

# Vanguardism

Ideology and Organization in Totalitarian Politics

Phillip W. Gray



# VANGUARDISM

Providing an innovative conceptualization of extremist political movements founded upon “world-historic” populations and vanguard party organizations, *Vanguardism* sets out a new path in investigating the intellectual and historical influences that created extremist politics, the totalitarian movements and regimes of the twentieth century, and a framework for interpreting extremism in the present.

Expanding its view across the turbulent intellectual currents of the nineteenth century, Phillip W. Gray illustrates how these ideas shaped the shared ideational and organizational structures that would develop into Leninism, Fascism, and Nazism in the early twentieth century. Moving beyond the Second World War, the book explicates how vanguardism did not vanish with the war's conclusion, but was modified throughout the period of national liberation movements and Western extremist groups over the ensuing decades. Concluding in the present with an eye to the future, Gray presents a framework for comprehending the extremist movements of today, and how organizational shifts can give us clues to the forms of totalitarian politics of tomorrow.

Original and provocative, *Vanguardism* will become essential reading for everyone looking to understand totalitarianism and extremist politics of our time.

**Phillip W. Gray** is an Assistant Professor at Texas A&M University at Qatar. Previously, he taught at numerous institutions in Hong Kong as well as at the United States Coast Guard Academy. His research focuses on research ethics, comparative political ethics, extremist organizations and ideology, and terrorism.

“‘Vanguardism’, a new animal joins the menagerie of political concepts, but thanks to Phillip Gray’s combination of inventiveness and scholarship, this one adds to our understanding of the deep mythic logic behind extreme illiberal movements and states which still tend to be dismissed as nihilistic, barbaric, or ‘evil’, and underestimated as an existential threat to the hegemony of liberal democracy. His book thus has a resonance far beyond the cloisters of academia and extends not just to the genocidal politics of Bolshevism and Nazism but to the bombed-out cars of Iraq and the weaponized vehicles of European capitals.”

—Roger Griffin, *Emeritus Professor in Modern History,  
Oxford Brookes University, UK*

“*Vanguardism* is a timely, readable, and important book. It establishes Phillip Gray as one of the world’s leading experts on political extremism.”

—George Hawley, *Associate Professor of Political Science,  
University of Alabama, US*

“In this book Phillip Gray makes an important contribution to the study of political radicalism and extremism. He does so by expanding the attention given to ‘vanguardism’ and, more saliently still, by substantially innovating that concept. By taking his cue from recent studies of totalitarianism – but making a good case that his implications go far beyond it – Gray successfully shows the range of political phenomena to which vanguardism applies. Thereby, in addition to repackaging the familiar twentieth-century examples, Gray has interesting things to say both about recent ‘subaltern’ variants of vanguardism (focused around colonised peoples and racial minorities) and, in phenomena like identity politics, its potential mainstreaming.”

—Richard Shorten, *Senior Lecturer in Political Theory,  
University of Birmingham, UK*

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## Ideology and Organization in Totalitarian Politics

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The research for this book illustrated numerous instances of vanguardism's sheer inhumanity against those viewed as "obstacles" or "Enemies" – far too many instances to count. For whatever reason, one story reverberated in my mind above the others. Although I have been unable to relocate it, the story remains very clear. The Holodomor having already progressed for some time, two members of the Komsomol were sent to investigate conditions in a particular village. Upon arriving, the activists found the village was starved and dead, with no evidence of living beings, human or animal. But to their surprise, the Komsomol members heard a noise in one of the dwellings. In searching for the origin of the sound, they discovered a young woman, driven to insanity by hunger, gnawing on a table leg. There was no further information on the woman, but one can surmise that she did not come to a happy end. Her name unknown, with all who knew her likely already dead, she became another nameless "excess" of the vanguardist imperative for social revolution. It is to her, and to the millions of similarly nameless victims of vanguardist politics, that this book is dedicated.



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The editorial staff of Routledge was quite supportive and professional, and I am very thankful for my editor, Natalja Mortensen. Her attention and focus throughout the publication process was a great help, and I am most grateful to her for all of her excellent work.

One person deserving of particular praise is my frequent co-author, constant source of intellectual engagement, and one of my dearest friends, Sara R. Jordan. For (many, many) years, she has dutifully put up with my various tangents on ideological reasoning, organizational minutiae, and the like, where she would bring order where too often there was chaos. Her insights, as well as her encouragement, helped make this research possible, and this book a reality.

# 1

## INTRODUCTION

In a way, all revolution is reaction.

*(Weber 1974: 35)*

To remake the world requires a people – not “The People”, but *a* people.

This work begins with questions – questions that have bedeviled much greater minds in this century. When looking at some of the worst regimes and movements of the twentieth century, how is it that groups with such diametrically opposed ideologies and constituency-populations also evinced strong and uncanny similarities? Are these regimes and movements part of some larger dynamic, and thus possess similar traits? Are the similarities a popular illusion brought about by the nearness in time and place between these types of groups? If the similarities are real, do they reflect more fundamental correspondences, or are they but a “fluke” – a historical accident based more on mere contingency than on anything else?

This text intends to answer this question, or at least present a framework within which to analyze these questions more thoroughly. That framework is “vanguardism”, a term used here to indicate a certain form of political phenomena based upon an intermeshing of ideology and organizational form. On the ideological level, vanguardism is based upon an epistemology that holds that only some types of people – based on some traits – are capable of seeing the “truth” of historical and social dynamics. This population of the epistemologically privileged, in turn, will reshape the world into something new and better, based on their ability to perceive reality as well as on their own world-historic role in the dynamic of history itself. The ideology influences and shapes the creation of organization, but the party organization itself then shapes the ideology. On the organizational level,

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vanguardism takes the notion of epistemology and moves it to a practical party: all of those within the epistemologically-privileged population will not be similarly “advanced”. Rather, there will be an “advanced wing” within it, responsible for enlightening the advanced population to its “mission”, to mobilize the population for future action, to ensure orthodoxy to the “truth”, and – most important of all – to coordinate and activate the population when the “ripe” moment arrives for social revolution. It is this “advanced wing” of the “advanced population” that is the vanguard party, and its organizational form will influence and shape the ideology from which it arose.

It is this undergirding ideological/organizational infrastructure that is the basis of commonality between these various extremist groups and systems. Their differences are not superficial, however. The ideological/organizational infrastructure is the same, but the basis for their respective worldviews – the epistemologically-privileged population – varies considerably. It is these different “world-historic” populations – based on class, nation, race, or other qualities – that create the fundamental conflicts between them. These populations are not interchangeable: the population type that is viewed as “advanced” will shape the specific ideological and organizational structures of the vanguardist group beyond the basic infrastructure. Vanguardism focuses on social revolution, pushed forward by the specific epistemologically-privileged population and directed by its “advanced wing”, as bringing forward a new world, and, with it, a new humanity.

## Vanguardism and Totalitarianism

One thing to note at the beginning is that this analysis of vanguardism is not simply an investigation of totalitarianism under a different name. The two phenomena are similar and overlap in many ways (theoretically and historically), but there are clear differences between the two. These differences are important to note, as a key debate in recent decades centers on whether “totalitarianism” itself is a meaningful concept. Various historians have questioned its utility (Gorlizki and Mommson 2009; also see Geyer and Fitzgerald 2009), while others see much of its use deriving from political contingencies of the Cold War or “neoconservative” ideology (Gleason 1995: 121–142, 190–209). For clarification’s sake, we will list three of them here. The first difference is definitional. Many of the more rigorous analyses of totalitarianism specifically focus on regimes, with the movements or organizations in the period before regime control investigated as precursors to the political systems arising later. As a definitional matter, this narrow focus is appropriate; while ordinary language may use the term in an elastic fashion, “totalitarianism” as a concept – whatever else it entails – presumes a political regime that can maintain and enforce such a system. The difficulty that arises in this narrow focus is in attempting to determine what was, or was not, a relevant precursor to an established totalitarian regime, and whether a regime is truly “totalitarian” it is taken on the terms used by precursor movements and leaders. This analysis of

vanguardism, in contrast, views totalitarian regimes as a further point of vanguard party movements with continuity over time, founded upon the aim “to replace the totality of experience, motivations, mobilisation, and social cohesion found within traditional religions by their new, secular ideologies and *Weltanschauung*” (Gray 2014: 538). Viewed in this manner, an investigation of vanguardism need not limit itself to those movements that managed to gain political power, but instead view those organizations that did achieve success in comparison to the numerous parties that failed to achieve this end.

The second difference focuses on a reverse problem from the first – specifically, overly broad definitions of “totalitarianism” rather than narrow versions. Loose uses of “totalitarianism” as a term often appear more in popular and/or ordinary language and writing, but this issue can arise in academic work as well (see Wolin 2008). More broadly, one encounters the impression that extreme levels of political violence and oppression are *ipso facto* totalitarian, perhaps a reflection of what Adriana Caverero calls “horrorism” (2009). In using a focus upon vanguardism instead, one can make clearer distinctions between types of violent organizations, clarifying those that are vanguardist versus those groups or events – such as Augusto Pinochet’s regime in Chile, or the groups responsible for the Rwandan genocide – that, while highly violent, are of a different type.<sup>1</sup> Although the relationship between vanguard groups and extreme violence is not contingent or accidental, extreme violence itself is not evidence of vanguardism (as it is not evidence of totalitarianism in the narrower definitions).

Third, the analysis of totalitarianism in political theory and philosophy often touches on larger issues of politics in itself. Two major thinkers who exemplify this tendency are Hannah Arendt and Eric Voegelin, although certainly others could also be put in this list. In the case of Arendt, her examination of totalitarianism (1968) focuses upon the combination of forces in the nineteenth century of the rising “mass”, anti-Semitism, and imperialism in the creation of the Nazi regime specifically. While focused on this specific phenomenon, the categorization of thought she uses places her analysis well within her broader political philosophy (see Arendt 1958). For Voegelin, totalitarianism is the product of a larger “pneumo-pathology”, based upon the inability to accept the *metaxy* (“in-betweenness”) nature of humanity (Voegelin 1952; see also Voegelin 1967: 261–264). Voegelin notes instances of this desire to “immanetize” Paradise as far back in history as Joachim of Fiore of the twelfth century, but argues that this tendency accelerates in the modern era. Voegelin first described totalitarian movements as “political religions” before moving to the language of “Gnosticism” (see Heilke 1994; Wiser 1980). Both Arendt and Voegelin provide many insights, much more than can be hinted at in these brief summaries. The problem in this style of investigating totalitarianism, however, is its all-encompassing nature. Starting with an analysis of totalitarianism as a means of entry into the foundational elements of the political, be it in modernity or in general, is a perfectly acceptable – perhaps even laudable – endeavor.

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But if we want to have a better understanding of these movements and regimes themselves, and how they viewed themselves, a better approach may be one that is limited: it is in this limited focus that an investigation of vanguardism is distinguished from these types of examinations of totalitarianism. As such, this analysis of vanguardism is more akin to the investigations of totalitarianism recently undertaken by Richard Shorten as well as David Ohana. Ohana's argument centers on the late nineteenth century, noting that "in modern totalitarianism the innovations are ideological consciousness, party organizations, the mobilization of the masses and the use of new technology for unification and control" (Ohana 2009a: 11). His emphasis is on the rise of nihilism, be it directly from Nietzsche, or in derived forms from Sorel, the Futurist movement, or others. Similarly, Shorten's recent work (2012) looks at a similar time period, emphasizing a tripartite set of influences on totalitarian regimes, which include scientism, utopianism, and revolutionary violence. One might certainly find broader conclusions about the political in this style of "narrow" investigation, but the primary aim remains the explication of a specific political phenomenon without necessarily making larger normative claims.<sup>2</sup>

The preceding discussion is not meant to deny any connection between vanguardism and totalitarianism. As noted earlier, it is not an accident that vanguard organizations create totalitarian regimes when in power, and indeed often have totalitarian-like elements within their internal organization even if they lack political power. For vanguard parties, their aim of reshaping the totality of experience, their belief in the epistemological supremacy of a specific population, their faith in the historical inevitability of victory, and their fixation on Enemy populations as attempting to subvert social revolution, provides ample incentives – organizational and ideological – to form totalitarian regimes. That vanguard organizations will be totalitarian in regimes under their control, however, is a separate issue from whether totalitarian regimes are inherently vanguardist. On this issue, this text (and its author) is agnostic; it may indeed be the case that vanguardism and totalitarianism are essentially linked, but it is also fully possible that totalitarianism can arise from numerous sources, with its vanguardist style being merely a historical accident of the early twentieth century. One can safely say that, although not all vanguard organizations succeed in bringing about totalitarian policies, their ideologies are inherently totalitarian; it would require a separate investigation to determine whether totalitarian systems are inherently vanguardist.

Finally, a note on terminology. For the most part, this work avoids the usage of "left" and "right" when discussing vanguard groups, except insofar as these labels play a significant role in the self-identification of these groups themselves. These directional terms for political ideology are intimately tied to time and place, which can lead to misunderstanding at the least regarding a specific vanguard organization's ideology. While terms like "left-Nazi" or "right-Bolshevik" can make sense in discussions focused only on a particular time (Germany before the "Night of the Long Knives" and Russia in the interregnum before Stalin's rise,

respectively), such terminology will at best cause confusion in a work that looks across time and place. Similarly, the usage of “right/left” in the American context fits poorly with vanguardism: if being a “rightist” means an emphasis on the free market, then almost all vanguard groups were leftist; if being a “leftist” means an emphasis on greater direct democratic control of political office, then almost all vanguard organizations were rightist. Rather than engaging in a likely fruitless exercise of bringing consistency to such terminology, the use of it is minimal in this text. The usage of “left” becomes more significant for our purposes when discussing subaltern forms of vanguardism, as the self-identification as “left” plays a major role in alliance formation between otherwise disparate groups. Additionally, this text does not delineate some vanguardist groups as “revolutionary” and others “reactionary” for definitional reasons that are evident in the cases analyzed. By seeking radical social revolution and revision, *all* vanguardist groups are inherently revolutionary. In contrast, a reactionary group would seek to make society “the way it used to be”, usually in some imagined sense of a previous status quo; while some vanguardist groups do look to the past for inspiration or guidance, these organizations do not view themselves as merely making an attempt to recreate the past, but rather to make something radically new.

## What Follows

Chapter 2 provides an overview of what “vanguardism” entails as a concept. After a brief discussion of the literature on vanguard parties, the chapter expands upon the six key elements within vanguardism. First is “category-based epistemology”, which provides the basis for understanding the social world and the centrality of a particular population, and implicitly leans toward elitist systems. The second element is the understanding of History, which bases itself upon specific dynamics and tends in a directional sense. Third is the notion of “science” based upon this view of History. The fourth element regards the totalism that derives from the first three elements. Fifth is the central importance of the Enemy category, in effect, the perceived antagonist in the “drama” of History. Sixth and finally, the organized vanguard party itself – its structure and relation to the previous five elements – is discussed.

Chapter 3 provides a “prehistory” of vanguardism, focusing upon events and dynamics (mostly) in the nineteenth century that provided space for vanguardism to develop before its “golden age” of success in the first half of the twentieth century. Specifically, the chapter notes the influences of Jacobism as a “proto-vanguard”, the importance of Hegel and Marx in the vanguardist formulation of History and of the “world-historic” population within it, the rise of mass politics and the response of elite theory, the spread of scientism as a form of moral discourse, concluding with the importance of the “crisis of Marxism” and, later, the First World War in creating space for vanguardism.

The following three chapters focus upon the major forms of vanguardism to come to prominence during the “golden age” (which could roughly be placed in

time as starting around 1910 and ending in about 1953). Perhaps the best manner to distinguish these groups is through their foundation in category-based epistemology, in other words, whether the “category” is based on economic class, cultural nation, or biological race. All three of these types share significant overlaps in ideational and organizational structure, with many of their (not-minor) differences arising from their varying starting populations.

In Chapter 4, we analyze the “vanguard of class”, specifically, those vanguard parties/organizations for which an economic class is the “epistemologically-privileged population”. As the first vanguard party to gain political power and maintain it (through the Bolshevik party), class-vanguards hold a place of importance historically. The chapter begins by noting key distinctions between class-vanguard parties in contrast to various forms of anarchist organization, while the rest of the chapter expands upon the qualities of class-vanguardism under the six-element rubric presented in Chapter 2.

Chapter 5 investigates the “vanguard of nation”, or those vanguard groups where the category of concern for epistemology is the nation and nationals. After explicating the important differences – ideological and organizational – between a nation-vanguard party and other forms of nationalist groups (such as militias), the chapter notes the unique aspects of national vanguardism. Of particular note in distinguishing nation-vanguards from the other two main types is its “idealist” versus “materialist” foundation; to put it another way, nation-vanguards tend to emphasize cultural or historical artifacts (language, custom, similar experiences) in contrast to the materialist (be it economic or biological) bases for the other two main vanguard types.

In Chapter 6, we turn to the “vanguard of race”, where the epistemologically-privileged population is founded upon some notion of biological race. For clarity’s sake, the chapter begins by noting the differences and distinctions between nation-vanguards and race-vanguards; as both types often use similar language, and as the two are linked in historical memory through the alliance of the nation-vanguard Italian Fascists and the race-vanguard German Nazis during the Second World War, it is of particular importance to ensure that we can clearly differentiate the two types. In addition, the chapter notes the overlaps between race and class-vanguards, as both emphasize a form of “materialist” category.

Chapter 7 concerns the period after 1953 and the ending of vanguardism’s “golden age”. The chapter notes the various changes arising in the aftermath of the Second World War, and the beginning of the American/Soviet “Cold War”, which created a much less amenable environment for vanguardist movements and parties to arise within the West itself. As a result, vanguardist organizations in a more “pure” form tended to arise in non-Western contexts, while vanguard-style organizations within the West changed internally as well as in response/conjunction with the non-Western vanguard types. The result – one that typifies much of the situation up to the current period – is an ideologically derivative and organizationally haphazard form of vanguardism, which could be labeled

the “vanguard of the subaltern”. In this form, the epistemologically-privileged population becomes a *mélange* of the “oppressed” often based more on alliances rather than theoretical/ideological connection, resulting in the Enemy category and the notion of totalism gaining greater importance as a manner of maintaining these alliances. With these factors in mind, we refer to this period – going into the present – as the “subaltern transition”.

Chapter 8 examines a form of vanguardism that deviates in significant ways from the previous versions discussed, specifically, the vanguard of God. Based upon religious foundations, the vanguard of God diverges from other vanguardist forms in the centrality of a non-human “population” in the Divine. Arising historically in manners differing from the vanguards of class, nation, and race, and often acting parallel or in tandem to the subaltern-vanguard, religious vanguardism presents unique challenges in conceptualization. Additionally, the sheer variety of religious traditions from which the vanguard of God can surface makes this particular form all the more difficult to summarize. As such, this chapter provides a brief overview of the main structures in common within religious vanguardism, while also noting the sundry manners in which the vanguard of God has appeared in the contemporary era.

Finally, the Conclusion discusses the question “transitioning to what?” It begins by noting organizational changes, arising from technological innovations, which create incentives toward networked organized forms as well as for “leaderless resistance” forms of organization. These new forms have been particularly evident in contemporary religious vanguardism. Further, the chapter briefly discusses an “emergent” form of vanguardism in the contemporary era, specifically environmentally focused vanguardism (or “eco-vanguardism”). As with the vanguard of God, eco-vanguardism founds itself upon a non-human “population”. The implications of this non-human change for organization and ideology will be considered briefly. Finally, the Conclusion notes how various elements of vanguardism have been “mainstreamed”, and how that may influence future developments.

## Notes

- 1 For further examination of this point, see the discussion of anarchist groups in Chapter 4 and the discussion of militia groups in Chapter 5.
- 2 Vanguardism is a function of this increased focus on leadership and its organization. However, it is not the only one; while not discussed here, another prominent form of elite organization could be put under the rubric of technocracy: the rule of experts (Olsen 2016). The separation between vanguardism and technocracy is, to an extent, analytic; in practice, overlaps can be seen.

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# 2

## VANGUARDISM AS CONCEPT

What is vanguardism? And what makes vanguardism different from other forms of elite leadership groups? Having briefly discussed the scholarly research on totalitarian politics generally in the introduction, this chapter will provide specifically the analytical framework of the vanguard form of ideology. The first section of this chapter will consider the scholarship of various analysts of vanguard parties. The remainder of this chapter will discuss the central elements of “vanguardism” as an ideational/organizational structure. There are six main elements in vanguardism discussed here, and although they are separated analytically in this chapter, these elements merge together and are mutually interdependent. As such, a discussion of one element will necessarily involve examination of the others. The six key aspects of vanguardism are: (1) category-based epistemology; (2) the understanding of History; (3) the notion of “science” based upon History; (4) an inherent sense of totality/totalism; (5) the Enemy category; and (6) the vanguard party organization itself. We will consider all of its major components in turn.

### Scholarship and the Vanguard Party

One of the great challenges in a study of vanguardism is the paucity of previous literature on the theory and structure of the vanguard organization itself, in contrast to the wealth of studies on particular organizations, movements, or leaders. There is no lack of research, of course, on the issues of totalitarianism, ideology, and extremist movements. As noted in the introduction, these include broad theoretical investigations of totalitarianism itself (Arendt 1968; Brzezinski and Friedrich 1956; also see Baehr 2010), or as an instance of “political religion” (Voegelin 1952; Wiser 1980; Gray 2014), among others. Other theoretical works focus on more specific forms of totalitarianism, such as Roger Griffin’s theory

of palingenesis in fascism (Griffin 2007) and Andrzej Walicki's interpretation of Leninist forms of totalitarianism originating in the Marxist theory of freedom (Walicki 1995). What is consistent in these works and numerous others on totalitarianism is that while the vanguard party itself might play some role in the discussion, the party's position usually takes second place to larger historical factors (in Voegelin), specific social relations (in Arendt), or the dominance of particular leaders, especially individuals such as Lenin or Hitler (Gellately 2007). With all of these alternate explanations, some historians have questioned whether "totalitarianism" has any use as a concept (Geyer and Fitzpatrick 2009).

Three recent analyses of totalitarianism – as it may pertain to vanguardism – come from Emilio Gentile, David D. Roberts, and Richard Shorten. Gentile (2006) extends on the idea of "political religion" through historical analysis (in contrast to the philosophical investigation from Voegelin), arguing that political religion is a subsection of the larger "sacralisation of politics" that occurred over the past 230 years. Specifically, he writes

By religion of politics, we mean a way of interpreting life and history, and perceiving politics – not just the calculations of power and vested interests. Moreover, a religion of politics takes these interpretations much farther – to the point where they define the meaning and final cause of existence.

*(Gentile 2006: 143)*

Following the increased interest, especially in studies of fascism, on the "performative" and ritualistic aspects of totalitarian regimes (Clark et al. 2007; Hau 2003; Ben-Ghiat 2001; on vanguardism and the avant-garde, see Maerhofer 2009), Gentile emphasizes the manner in which such regimes create a religiosity of politics as a matter of practice, where "political religion" excludes all other sources of legitimacy versus "civic religion" that does not require such exclusivity. Roberts (2006) places totalitarianism in a partially Nietzschean framework of "grand politics", with each of the totalitarian regimes involved in "a quest for an alternative modernity" (Roberts 2006: 412). Finally, Shorten (2012) addresses reframing the main characteristics of totalitarianism as scientism, utopianism, and revolutionary fervor. But of particular note, Shorten also provides a very useful terminology for ascertaining the connections – direct or accidental – between earlier thinkers and totalitarian ideologies:

"Affinity" means that there is 'a genuine similarity of essential features' between antecedent object and projected outcome ... "Influence" is far more easily identified with a casual role. Influence makes something eligible to be considered a source if it can be shown that "one man was directly influenced in his outlook by the writings of another".

*(Shorten 2012: 77–78)*

In properly understanding vanguardism as a concept and as an ideological/organizational structure, these distinctions are important to maintain. Chapter 3 will attend to influences in the development of vanguardism, while this conceptual chapter will focus upon affinities between vanguardist organizations, fleshed out in greater detail throughout this work.

Rather than large, theoretical analyses of these organizations, the majority of works instead concentrate upon case studies of a specific vanguard group. These can include broad discussions of movements (Schivelbusch 2006; Molyneux 2003 [1978]; Weber 1966), or studies concentrating on a specific party organization (Rabinowitch 2007; Liddick 2006: 69–80; Germino 1964) which might also include some discussion of the particular party's influence upon other groups (Bloom and Martin 2013: 290–308). Some studies provide details on specific portions of the broader vanguard organization, such as the “Schutzstaffel” (SS) of the German Nazi party (Höhne 1969), while other research deals with the organizations somewhat tangentially, often through biographies of central figures. This form of discussion is particularly notable with Lenin (see Le Blanc 2006: 80–88; Cliff 1986; Lukács 1970), but not limited to him.<sup>1</sup>

A major difficulty in previous research on vanguard groups is the normative implication, and motivation, underlying such studies. In this type of literature, the explicit focus is either on finding strategies or tactics that can undermine or defeat such organizations (the negative perspective), or on rationalizing, justifying, or perhaps even advocating for the group (the positive perspective). The negative perspective analyzes vanguard parties from the standpoint of combating criminal and/or national security threats. The studies in this framework can, among other things, provide a textual analysis of a specific subset of extremist groups, such as “fighting communist organizations” (Alexander and Pluchinsky 1992), or may use more broad, algorithmic analysis for groups in general (see Everton 2012: 32–45). These works usually consider these groups from the paradigm of terrorism, providing a useful (but possibly overly specific) lens (Karmon 2005). For other scholars, the examination of a particular vanguard group – especially its comparative strengths and weaknesses – are part of a desire to find examples for revolutionary theory and action (Bloom and Martin 2013: 396–400; Le Blanc 1993: 345–361). Finally, some works move to full advocacy of the organization, such as those written by former spokesmen for the group (Rosebraugh 2004).

In focusing on vanguardism itself, there is one notable exception to these tendencies.<sup>2</sup> The most significant previous work comes from Aryeh L. Unger's comparative analysis of the “totalitarian party” (Unger 1974). Unger's comparative analysis of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union provides a significant introduction to the role of party in these forms of government. However, his investigation primarily focuses upon the party as the agency for promoting and propagating the regime in question rather than the party's relationship to the foundational ideology itself.

To expand our understanding of how organizational structure and ideology inform and shape each other, we must extend from the works on totalitarianism in general or specific groups in particular. The remainder of this chapter provides a framework in which this expansion can proceed. By outlining the contours of vanguardism as the starting point for investigation, both the “affinities” and “influences” (in Shorten’s words) may become clearer. We begin with the first, and foundational, element of vanguardism: category-based epistemology.

## Category-Based Epistemology

The foundational element of vanguardism is “category-based epistemology”.<sup>3</sup> Specifically, category-based epistemology indicates that a specific mass population holds a uniquely important place in social/historical development, and this position gives the group privileged access to “truth” as a result. “Truth” here need not denote some transcendent standard, but instead means that this group is capable of observing the actual dynamics influencing, shaping, and (in a sense) determining the direction of History, society, and human development. The category itself is a group with some (theoretically) identifiable trait(s). Beyond this rather general criterion, almost any mass population could be the focus of a vanguardist ideology.<sup>4</sup> The defining traits can be economic (one’s place within the social process of production), national (understood primarily in political or cultural terms), racial/ethnic, or upon “oppression” (a population defined by its position of subordination to others) among others. The traits themselves are often underdefined within vanguard ideology, leading to ambiguities in practice in determining who is in the “correct” category and who is not. For many vanguard ideologies, a central trait of being a member within this category is consciousness: while certain “material” precursors are necessary for one to be part of this population, consciousness of being in this category, with its related knowledge, duties, and final goals, is a strong part of the category’s foundation. For all vanguard forms, a central element in the category’s privileged epistemology is the population’s suffering at the hands of some form of oppression, an exploitation created by the current totality of destructive forces.

Category-based epistemology serves as the starting point for the rest of vanguard ideology, as all the other aspects of vanguardism (including the party itself) depend upon the special population and its unique epistemology as a foundation for knowledge and action.<sup>5</sup> The attributes of the category, its “true” needs and its character, define the population’s role within History itself, serves as a heuristic for understanding history up to this point, identifies the Enemy, and shapes the self-perception of the vanguard party. Throughout the discussion of vanguardism, the centrality of the category/population and its epistemology will be evident.<sup>6</sup>

Inherent in category-based epistemology is the notion that knowledge of the actual dynamics of History is not accessible to all equally, and that inequality of access is not primarily based upon differences in cognitive and intellectual ability. It is membership in the epistemologically-privileged category that gives one

access to truth: what you *know* depends upon what you *are*.<sup>7</sup> This knowledge provides its own rationality, which is needed to comprehend, predict, and practically use this knowledge of History. How this ability arises depends on the particular vanguardist ideology, but there are generalizable similarities. For all vanguard parties, the special population holds a unique and advanced place in the dynamics of History. Category members are not necessarily more virtuous than others (although this is usually implied, if not stated). Rather, the underlying dynamics have “pushed” this category to the forefront in the ongoing process of conflict/struggle that underpins historical development. Usually, the struggle to consciousness for this “advanced” population is structured similarly to the “lord/servant” dialectic (Hegel 2003 [1807]: 104–112; see Halberstam 1999: 176–182), in that the group is described as being oppressed, often in a manner never before seen in human history. This suffering, and the associated struggle to overcome adversity, provides the category members with a perspective on true reality that is simply epistemologically (perhaps even ontologically) impossible for those outside the “advanced” population to perceive.

Another similarity between vanguard groups is the re-articulation of rationality, which redefines the boundaries of rational argument. The epistemologically-privileged population not only has its own access to truth, but has its own “science”, one with significant differences compared to other groups, particularly the dominant Enemy category. This “science” entails a redefining of evidence and facts that may emphasize “tendencies”, experience, or emotive measures over “instrumental” forms of reasoning.<sup>8</sup> Other populations can only see the passing particulars of empirical reality (“facts”) and, because of their category-based misunderstanding of reality, argue that these “facts” reflect some eternal ideal or “natural law”. The epistemologically-privileged population, on the other hand, has the means (“science”) to understand the underlying dynamics and “tendencies” of these “facts”, seeing in them the actual process of History.<sup>9</sup>

A final major element of category-based epistemology is its re-articulation of the group membership. As noted above, vanguard ideologies are often ambiguous in their identification of the traits of the privileged population. The relationship between true knowledge and category/population membership is somewhat dialectical: being a member of the population is necessary to have true knowledge; but if a person has true knowledge, then s/he must (in some sense) be a member of the epistemologically-privileged population. This is a particularly sensitive point, as many of the main thinkers/leaders for vanguard ideologies do not comfortably fit into the epistemologically based category. Since lack of “true” knowledge is not something “accidental”, having such vision is a matter of essence. “Essence” here is defined by the category itself: those outside of it inherently are incapable of seeing the truth, even if they are exceptionally educated and/or intelligent. Individuals outside of the category might be able to access the truth, but only if in some sense they have “taken on” an identity with the epistemologically-privileged population (such as the “declassed” bourgeois within various

class-vanguard groups). Similarly, a member of the epistemologically-privileged population without a raised consciousness can be viewed either as suffering from “false consciousness” or, worse, as a “traitor” to the category. As the development of category consciousness depends not only on attributes but also acceptance of the category *qua* category, ideological dissent is the equivalent of category betrayal.

As a broad rule open to particular qualifications, there are three types of membership in the epistemologically-privileged population: the most advanced members (usually attached to the vanguard party), the mass of the category that has potential knowledge of the truth and is also the “motor” by which the advanced members gain their legitimacy and strength, and finally, category-traitors, who have abandoned the truth and are therefore no better than the Enemy population. Regardless of the underlying dynamic that undergirds the category’s knowledge, the main dividing line in this tripartite grouping is the role of ideas: whether one accepts the “truth” or does not, and why.

Category-based epistemology rearticulates rationality in another sense: under this view, knowledge cannot be purely theoretical or merely “abstract”. The category’s knowledge is a practical, active form of knowledge, in that it both follows the “grooves” of the dynamics of History while at the same time channeling this knowledge toward the end of radically reshaping the world:

The radical not only rejects existing reality; he wants and seeks to transform it. He has not only a vision of an ideal order but a belief in the possibility of realizing it, of moving from the world as it is to the world as it ought to be.

(*Tucker 1969: 184*)

As such vanguard ideologies view the “education” of the epistemologically-privileged population arising in practice, which can include day-to-day experience (as alienated subjects operating under oppression, or as cultural subjects sharing a national community, among others) or in the more protracted conflicts and antagonisms against the category’s Enemies. The knowledge of the epistemologically-privileged population is not mere “book learning”, but rather practical activism, often described as “*praxis*” or “action”. The connection between epistemologically-privileged population, knowledge, and action is straightforward. If History is a process, one that has certain dynamics and ends, then the “advanced”/“vanguard” population is itself part of this process, as is the knowledge/consciousness it gains from its part in History.

## History

The next major attribute of vanguardism is a certain understanding of History (rather than “history”).<sup>10</sup> History is entwined at a fundamental level with the epistemologically-privileged population: it is History that brings this particular category into its role as a world-historic group, but the category itself is also

necessary for History to reach its final destination. Moreover, the dynamics of History give this particular epistemologically-privileged group its ability to see “true” reality, although to what level (and by what processes) depends upon the underlying ideology/population itself (see Jay 1984: 105 for his similar discussion of “progressive longitudinal totality”).

While the specifics of History, and the dynamic that serves as the main “motor” of History, vary depending on the population/category, there are consistencies. All believe that existence (at least in its social forms) is not accidental. While certain aspects of “history” could have been different, the main development, structures, and institutions of human interaction *must* have come into existence, in that the dynamics of History by their nature “forced” these things into being. Second, History is not accidental but directional, and this directional nature can be known by human beings (in the epistemologically-privileged category). In its broad strokes, History has certain observable patterns and necessary movements, which observation of the past, and its direction toward the present, make clear. The rise and fall of social classes, empires, and others are not mere contingencies of life, but instead have a meaning far beyond what could have been known at the time. In this sense, vanguard parties are far from nihilistic: History is not a collection of random happenings upon which the vanguard artificially creates an order, but instead is the result of a real dynamic. Third, and related to the second, the ability to know that History is directional, with the observation of the past toward the present, also leads one to see the track on which History is headed. As History is not accidental, its dynamics from past to present clearly point toward what is coming, even if it lacks full clarity. Fourth, History has an “end”, or at least what could be called a “radical break” from the present to the society of tomorrow – the world of “New Men” – that makes the new society unrecognizable to the present. This point is particularly important. A population/ideology holding the first three traits would not necessarily be a vanguard group: eschatology is needed. The end/“break” of History is transformative in a spectacular manner. For some vanguard groups (especially those based on class), this end is an “End of History”, where the dynamics that have thus far pushed human society and existence cease to operate, leading to some form of perfect existence: not an imaginary “utopia”, but an actual one that comes into existence not because of wishful thinking but as a direct result of the dynamics of History itself.<sup>11</sup> For other vanguard types, especially those based on national or racial populations, the dynamics of struggle may not end once and for all, but the nature of human society (and perhaps humanity itself) are radically altered.

On the societal level, most vanguard groups identify an original “fall from grace” in human interaction. One should not mistake this “fall from grace” as indicating that there was some Eden-like, paradisiacal society before the great collapse. Rather, this “pre-history” is similar to that described in Rousseau’s *Second Discourse* (Rousseau 1984 [1754]): the period before History’s dynamics came into



full force may have been “peaceful” in some sense, but humanity itself had not reached its full potential, and may not have been “human” in any relevant sense. With the start of the dynamic of History, the struggle between human misery as well as the movement toward the final end of human emancipation/advancement comes into existence. History makes this struggle a necessary condition for final emancipation. The “fall” can arise with the formulation of private property (Rousseau), the rise of the division of labor in the mode of production (class-vanguards), the “decadence” of a previously acceptable society (nation-vanguard), “mixing” of peoples through migrations (race-vanguard), the development of agriculture (eco-vanguard), or others. Unlike the Edenic story, where the fall involves transcendental/metaphysical interactions, the “fall” in vanguard ideologies is accessible through reason – by the epistemologically-privileged population – as these events are *this-worldly*. If vanguard ideology places a “sacred History” over that of “mundane history”, its actors, end, and its “heaven” are all earthly: a peculiarly modern Promethean rejection of assistance/legitimation from “metaphysical” forces (see Gray 2014: 538).

## Science

Part of the emancipatory nature of the privileged category is that it can now access the “true” science reflective of the “true” dynamics in a manner that other groups could not. Moreover, one of the key attributes of membership into the category is the acceptance of this new form of knowledge and rationality, abandoning the old ways of thinking. “Science” becomes the means by which the privileged category and History interact: the category knows History through this “science”, and “science” provides the vanguard category with the ability to know the main ends of History, as well as the practical activism required to bring the final end into full existence. Rather than looking to “facts”, instead one looks to “tendencies”: as such, one could say that ten thousand “facts” do not make one tendency.

While the mass of the epistemologically-privileged group may have a merely “intuitive” understanding of History, the advanced part of the category realizes that History is indeed explicable: there is a “science” to the understanding of History and of society’s dynamics. Among those with the “highest consciousness” (the vanguard party), this science is all-important. Lukács provides a good summary of this perspective, coming from the specifically Leninist perspective, when he writes:

the objective reality of social existence is *in its immediacy* ‘the same’ for both proletariat and bourgeoisie. But this does not prevent *the specific categories of mediation* by means of which both classes raise this immediacy to the level of consciousness, by means of which the merely immediate reality becomes for both the authentically objective reality, from being fundamentally different,

thanks to the different position occupied by the two classes within the “same” economic process.

(Lukács 1971: 150)

Some of the main outlines of the “science” of History are available to the epistemologically-privileged category: indeed, by merely changing the names (say, from “proletariat” to “producers” or “Aryans”), one has effectively the same type of argument for other vanguardist ideologies. While the “immediate” reality may be the same for those inside and outside of the epistemologically-privileged group, only those with the correct “categories of mediation” (or, more broadly, the proper “science”) can truly grasp what is going on. Those outside, as a direct result of their social (be it economic, racial, or other) placement are incapable of seeing this truth.

The vanguardist notion of “science” has significant differences from science as understood in ordinary language. The primary division lies with the issue of “value-free” science, or what might also be called “context-free” science. In ordinary language (as well as positivistic) uses of the term “science”, a major goal of scientific methodology is to search for the truth “out there” as separated as possible from personal and/or social biases, limitations, and assumptions. In theory, scientific methodology should provide theories and evidence that are intersubjectively verifiable, or at least intersubjectively comprehensible. While the personal and/or psychological motives for doing scientific research may be intensely “valued” and context-based, the final goal of scientific methodology is knowledge as separate from the peculiarities of one’s particular station/position/epoch as possible.

The vanguard notion of “science” stands diametrically opposed to this view. Deriving from category-based epistemology, vanguard “science” must reject the idea that knowledge is accessible to all: rather, where one “stands” on evidence depends upon where one “sits”. Only those who “stand” with the epistemologically-privileged category have the ability to understand this true “science” of History. To “stand” with the vanguard category means that only those within the category (or who have identified with it by some means) can access History, and more to the point, one must “stand” with the category *as the progressive population in History*, and not merely as a disinterested observer, to comprehend the “science” of History. This “science” is primarily a science of action or *praxis*: the very nature of this knowledge is not toward passive contemplation of the world as it is, but an active orientation toward the world that is coming and toward which those with knowledge should move. For vanguard ideologies, a science that aims to be free of the social-historical context of its practitioners and aiming only at observation is an inherently reactionary undertaking. At most, this “value-free” science serves only to reify the current modes of social existence, pretending that the fluctuating present is actually some eternal state of being.

This activist notion of “science” denotes, therefore, *who* can access the “truth” (the vanguard category, and specifically the “vanguard of the vanguard”), *what* this

“science” studies (the dynamics of History, however defined), and *how* this “science” is to be used (combining theory and practice in moving History toward its next, likely final, point). This activist “science” is not accidental or contingent: History itself has placed the vanguard population in this position. In many vanguard ideologies, this leads to dissonance regarding science. On the one hand, “science” cannot be context- and value-free, as it is based on the progressive role of the category within History itself. On the other hand, “science” is “value-free” in that its dynamics and predictions are completely independent of the desires of any human beings: in the vanguardist self-perception, they are not acting as moralists or utopians (viewed as “dreamers”), but instead as the most accurate and perceptive of scientists.

As History drives all (relevant) human interactions, and “science” provides access to understanding this historical dynamic, the knowledge is unlimited, at least in theory. “Science” becomes the key to understanding human interaction in the past and present as it moves into the future. The dynamics of History are not limited merely to one sphere of life or one aspect of human existence: instead, all things are connected, and “science” shows how this occurs. This leads us to the next major element in vanguardism: totality.

## **Totality**

Within vanguardist ideology, there is no realm of human life “outside” the dynamics of History. There may be aspects that are comparatively irrelevant in themselves, but even these irrelevancies reflect and are symptomatic of the broader dynamics in play. As these dynamics of History permeate all parts of society, nothing is enclosed away from everything else: vanguardist ideology by necessity must also be totalistic in its view of human society.

A focus on “totality” itself need not be vanguardist in nature, as most religions and worldviews attempt, at least naively, to explain “everything”. What distinguishes this general form of totality from the vanguardist version? There are three distinctions. First, totality in vanguard ideology is immanentist, in that the totality does not involve any “exogenous variables” of a metaphysical nature: its totalism is explicitly this-worldly. The this-worldly nature of vanguard totality distinguishes it, for instance, from most forms of religion, which hold that the totality operates under the power and/or observation of divinity; usually connected to this divine idea is that the totality is in the control of God alone, and generally only knowable to the divinity itself. The second main distinction with vanguard totality is the directional and voluntarist elements within History as it guides human interactions. Unlike a purely scientific perspective (which views human interaction as functionally similar to dynamics in the physical world, and thus “totality” entails finding patterns in a contingent and meaningless dynamics that can be formalized into scientific explanations) where all activity is also “this-worldly”, the vanguardist view holds that the totality is headed in a specific, knowable direction, and that

human action – specifically, that of the vanguard category – is an essential element toward this movement. Immanent, directional, activist totality exemplifies the vanguard idea of the whole. The third main distinction is that vanguardism emphasizes the necessary role of violence in totality: violence in the dynamics of History (especially from oppression), and violence by the epistemologically-privileged population to bring about social revolution. While this violence may begin as “private” violence by the organization (as the “advanced wing” of the population), a major aim of vanguards is to gain and maintain political power, insofar as the force of the State provides an efficient means to bring their totality into existence.

This version of totality is a direct result of the idea of History within vanguard ideologies. The dynamics that bring the epistemologically-privileged category to its progressive role are not limited to that one group: rather, all aspects of human interaction are driven by this same dynamic. As these dynamics are total, the vanguard category has access to the totality of human existence: there is nothing its “science” cannot, at least in theory, analyze and criticize. Moreover, totality reaffirms the world-historic role of the vanguard category toward History’s final end. Totality thus provides a strongly universalist element within all vanguard ideologies, regardless of how particularistic they may seem. Vanguard ideologies are in some sense irreducibly particularistic, in that only one category/population is progressive and capable of true understanding. However, that one population’s actions are not limited to itself, but rather essentially influence all other groups and people and serves as a “universal population”. With the exception of the Enemy (discussed below), the change brought by the epistemologically-privileged category will cause universal benefits.<sup>12</sup> Totality presents the vanguard category as the “pivot” of History: the salvation or destruction (moral, perhaps even physical) of the human species hinges upon the success of the vanguard in fulfilling its historical function. But the totality of human interactions cannot merely be affirmed; the negative totality must be destroyed.

In its perception of the present world, vanguardist totality emphasizes the sheer negativity of the present. While this negativity has already been alluded to briefly in the analysis of History, totality helps explain how this negativity comes to the fore. As all parts of human society are interconnected, the corruption of one part of society/human interaction indicates, and perhaps even causes, corruption in all aspects of society. Piecemeal actions and gradualist policies are therefore inherently flawed. For vanguards, the irrational totality of the present cannot be purified through treating “symptoms”; as the present totality itself is irrational, flawed, and reactionary, the solution can only be a totalistic one. The imperative to purge society entirely of the present’s evils continues on for vanguardist groups upon gaining control of a political regime; the tendency for revolutions to “eat their children” partially results from the need for complete purity in the totality. A central part of this purging process, one in which the vanguard party is essential for radical change, is the weakening and removal of the main beneficiaries and abettors of the negative, present totality: the Enemy.

## The “Enemy”

Within vanguardism, there is one other population that has a similar level of importance to the epistemologically-privileged category, although in a negative fashion. This other population also plays an important, if indirect, role. While most other groups in society are at best reactionary obstructions of little importance in the grander dynamics in question (“history-less” nations or groups), one population is more active: the Enemy.<sup>13</sup> In brief, the Enemy category is a population shaped via the same dynamics of History that created the epistemologically-privileged category, but rather than suffering oppression under the irrational and unjust totality of the present, the Enemy is this totality’s main beneficiary. Although blind to these dynamics, the Enemy category acts, both voluntarily and by necessity, to reinforce, strengthen, and legitimate the present system. The Enemy, for vanguardist ideology, has a necessary role as the chief opponent of the advanced population and thus in providing the resistance to change that prompts the required “consciousness-raising” and “struggle” on the part of the epistemologically-privileged population to achieve social revolution. In the practice of vanguardism, vanguard parties are defined as much by their Enemies as they are by the progressive category.<sup>14</sup> An ambiguous and conflicting image of the Enemy arises within vanguardist organizations, as the Enemy is viewed as blind, flailing to hold on to a dying order, doomed to annihilation in the company of the present system; and yet the Enemy is also viewed as nearly omnipresent and cunning, commanding the corrupt totality of the present with the aim of preventing the advanced population from achieving its Historical mission.

As the epistemologically-privileged population moves toward a more perfect future, the Enemy category acts to preserve the horrors of the present. As the vanguard category is the most oppressed and suffering group in human history, so too is the Enemy category the most oppressive and harsh in all History. The Enemy category also has its own form of “knowledge”, but it is an inherently flawed one, mistaking the particular, passing moment of history as some form of eternal way of being: the Enemy is inherently and irredeemably blind. While the progressive category understands History as Becoming (however articulated), the Enemy category is mired in the illusion of Being, seeing permanence where there is none. Just as it is the imperative for the privileged category to move toward the final end of History, so it is the role of the misbegotten Enemy category to do all in its power to stifle this move, as the final end of History will also be the fatal end of this group. The enmity of these two categories is inherent in them both, with fundamental compromise between them an impossibility.

The Enemy category, in a sense, holds almost as important a theoretical role in vanguard ideology as the epistemologically-privileged category. In vanguardism, the Enemy category is not a group that is misunderstood, it cannot be negotiated with, and “co-existence” between it and the vanguard category is an impossibility over the long term:

A revolutionary movement that is sure of victory will forget everything else. But the moment the leaders acknowledge that the old order is to continue, by negotiating with it, the rank and file begin to worry about their jobs, their homes, the attitude of the foreman and the local policeman. Even under the best conditions, negotiations with the enemy mean that support begins to crumble.

(Harman 2003 [1982]: 81)

But the Enemy category itself is ambiguous, in a certain sense. The Enemy category becomes the embodiment of all that is wrong within the present totality: it is inherently irrational yet simultaneously quite cunning in its self-protection. The discussion of the Enemy category itself is often mired in contradictory statements within vanguardist literature: whatever actions the Enemy category takes, even if these actions seem to go against the theoretical expectations of vanguard ideology, it merely reflects a feint on the Enemy's part to forestall its collapse and destruction. In this sense, the Enemy category takes on the role not dissimilar to that of the "dark principle" or the "evil god" of Manichaeism (Stoyanov 2000: 86–96); as the primary population of the corrupt present, all present evils are, in some sense, the direct responsibility of the Enemy category. This "simplification" of the roles between vanguard and Enemy categories (to use Georges Sorel's phrase: see Sorel 2004 [1950]) increases the coherence of the vanguard ideology, as well as providing a blatant contrast between the progressive and reactionary category, which is useful in motivating and energizing the mass of the vanguard category itself.

These differences between the vanguard and their Enemies are absolute, and can only be solved through revolutionary violence. One should note that violence *tout court* is not, for the most part, the aim of vanguard ideologies, but the fixation on violence is also not merely accidental or secondary. To destroy the corrupt present and its ruling Enemy category – and, even more importantly, to crush the Enemy category and its minions in their ongoing attempts at "counter-revolution" – revolutionary violence is a necessary part of vanguard thinking and practice. The rhetoric and descriptions of vanguard parties indicate the intrinsic connection with violence. The main struggle is almost always couched in the language of warfare. Whether civil war or international war, vanguardism presumes total (and often eliminationist) war as needed for the revolution, and to remove the Enemy from power. Among some vanguard thinkers, the act of violence itself is liberatory, as it brings the member of the vanguard category out of his/her "slave" mentality by killing the "master". But perhaps most important of all is the *type* of war that vanguard ideologies advocate; as the totality of human existence is at stake, revolutionary violence takes on the aspect of total warfare. Limiting the effectiveness and violence of the attacks on the Enemy category and its society can only aid counter-revolutionary forces. The only limitations on revolutionary violence are not moral, but merely instrumental. The rubric of the "justness" of revolutionary violence is whether it objectively aids the furtherance of the

vanguard class toward its final historical end in the given context. As such, violence that might be “un-revolutionary” today might, with a change of “concrete circumstances” or “correlation of forces”, become revolutionary – indeed, even obligatory – tomorrow.

With the final goals always in sight through the proper use of “science”, the vanguard group can make the types of tactical, or even mid-strategic, changes in actions/slogans/alliances quickly in order to achieve victory. While referring to Marxism specifically, Chris Brown’s explication of this idea is a satisfactory description of the vanguardist notion in general:

Right action is a matter of theory, not morality. It is not a question of doing the right thing in response to codes of conduct or principles, but of correctly grasping what course of action corresponds to the needs of the moment. These needs are shaped by the paramount necessity to hasten the achievement of successful proletarian revolution.

*(Brown 1992: 230)*

Vanguards’ decision rules are not focused on some eternal “natural law” of right action, but rather are focused on whatever means are best suited to bringing about the final revolution in current circumstances. “Science” provides the tools for the vanguard party to assess concrete conditions and the potential “revolutionary moment”, as well as the ability to advance the consciousness of the vanguard category. The means are, quite literally, determined and justified by the end. The party organization, therefore, serves to provide the nuanced analysis necessary to ensure that the vanguard category does not go down a “wrong” track, either by attempting to seize power too early or missing a chance at revolution when the moment is ripe.

A “science” requires scientists, and a “war” requires generals. Particularly in the conditions of the corrupted present, when vast swaths of the vanguard category are mired in false consciousness, false needs, and only intuitive and “spontaneous” forms of action, how can History progress? How can the final, felicitous end be reached? It is here that we find the actors that will “push” History along, the vanguard of the vanguard. We now reach the vanguard party organization.

### The Vanguard Party

At the apex of this conceptual structure stands the vanguard party itself, the organizational embodiment of the epistemologically-privileged group and of the dynamics which the group understands, the “vanguard of the vanguard”. The vanguard party organization makes its sole purpose the activation of the epistemologically-privileged category, leading this category through various means (education, agitation, propaganda), and particularly in assessing and leading the epistemologically-privileged category through evaluating the tactics most

conducive to bringing about the final, total revolution in human society. If the vanguard category has the potentiality to move History on its path, the vanguard party organization serves as the category's activating catalyst, the "spark" that will start the flames of revolution, with the category's limitless energy and action razing and remaking the world.

The knowledge of science and the will to act distinguishes the advanced from the mass, the "enlightened" from the "spontaneous".<sup>15</sup> While all members of the privileged category have the potential to understand History, and while this category holds the key to the movement of History toward its end, only a minority of this category actually have this type of knowledge at the present time. There may be radiating levels of this knowledge, but the apex of this knowledge resides with the advanced members of the category, who will likely serve as the core of the vanguard party organization. Others who are similarly "enlightened", but perhaps do not have it fully developed in them, may serve in auxiliary positions. Because the vanguard party has access to this "science", while the masses presently only "know" the dynamics of History in an intuitive or "habitual" sense, the party organization serves as the "vanguard of the vanguard": the most advanced sector of the most advanced category. It is in this knowledge that the party gains its legitimacy. The vanguard party uses "science" for two primary purposes: for "educating" the mass of the category into true knowledge of its condition and role, and to analyze "scientifically" what practical tactics and activities will bring about the next stage in History most successfully and/or efficiently.

Before delving into specific attributes of the vanguard party organization itself, we must be clear about what the vanguard party is *not*, at least from its own self-perspective. First, the vanguard organization is not simply a conglomeration of "enlightened" individuals, grouped together out of some random feeling of mutual solidarity; while overlapping in some regards, vanguardism is not a technocratic structure. Distinct from a form of "emancipatory elitism" as might be found in the views of Saint-Simon and Comte, the vanguard party organization – just like the vanguard category itself – is created through the dynamics of History, and thus serves a function independent of the personalistic desires and peccadilloes of any of its members. Second, and related to the first, the vanguard party is *not* the motor of the revolution, nor can it alone bring about the totalistic change from the corrupt present into the good future. For vanguard party ideology, the view that the vanguard in and of itself is the driving force of change and acts (in some sense) autonomously is the height of erroneous, "utopian", and "Blanquist" (as used in Marxist terminology) adventurism.<sup>16</sup>

The vanguard party organization serves a necessary and important function, but it is only capable of being what it is because first, it serves, leads, and derives its strength and energy from the privileged category, and second, the dynamics of History have brought society and the vanguard category into a "revolutionary moment" where radical action is possible and can be successful. Lacking the mass-based vanguard category and/or the correct historical moment, there can be no



vanguard party in the true sense, but only a group of “adventurers” or contrarians suffering from delusions of grandeur. Third, the vanguard party does not “stand above” the vanguard category in a necessarily elitist sense. This statement requires some clarification, and will be discussed in greater detail below; while some forms of vanguardism do emphasize the inequality between the vanguard party and the epistemologically-privileged category (as in many forms of nation- or race-vanguards), and all vanguard parties in practice effectively do the same (the comparative “infallibility” of a Leninist party’s “science” being typical), the vanguard party cannot stand “above” and “outside” the category. As the party gains its strength, meaning, and purpose from the vanguard category, any attempt at separating the party’s goals from the “true” interests of the privileged group must necessarily be reactionary and counter-revolutionary. Finally, vanguard party ideology implicitly assumes that the vanguard organization cannot be the whole of the vanguard category. If the “righteous remnant” of humanity is coterminous with the vanguard party itself, then one is dealing with a sect rather than a vanguard organization based upon a mass population. While vanguardist structures need not perceive the epistemologically-privileged category as being a majority in society or the world (although it does often make just such an assumption), they do assume that the vanguard category is a comparatively large population. One can safely view vanguardism as inherently connected with mass politics; without mass politics, vanguardism simply cannot come to fruition.

In general, there are three attributes that make up a vanguard party organization. First, the vanguard party is an *organization*, in contrast to a discussion group, an occasional conference of the like-minded, or some type of book club. It is through organization that the various instruments of the vanguard party members (leadership, tactical analysis, education, propaganda, agitation, and the like) come together in a coherent line of attack, and it is through organization that the party can mobilize and “activate” the epistemologically-privileged category. Organizational matters, and therefore organizational *unity*, become key concerns. Only by ensuring that the organization is internally coherent (avoiding useless redundancies, formulating a clear line of command, etc.), structurally sound (a clear connection to the vanguard category, a clear mission, standard operating procedures and contingency plans for dealing with government raids and infiltrators, etc.), and constructed in a manner that allows for expansion and growth can the vanguard party hope to achieve success and to remain true to the interests of the privileged category. Without organization, the vanguard party will be the victim of constant internal battles, distorted by personal disputes (as occurred in the First International with the battles between Marx and Bakunin), easy prey to police actions, and ineffective in educating and leading the epistemologically-privileged category.

Second, the vanguard party organization is led (as well as staffed) by a group of *professional revolutionaries*. To avoid misunderstanding, one needs to be clear what “professional revolutionary” entails. In the popular mind, such a figure has

almost a romantic (or horrifying) aspect: such a person is viewed either as the strapping dedicated rebel, or as the fixated fanatic who remains a revolutionary “when alone, quite alone and going to bed” (Conrad 1982 [1908]: 389). While an unflinching dedication to the revolutionary cause and the vanguard category are necessary conditions in being a true “professional revolutionary”, this role describes a function more than it describes a mentality. Indeed, it is fully possible that one of these “professional revolutionaries” might have a life more similar to that of an accountant than a Pyotr Verkhovensky. The professional revolutionary is someone whose “job” (“vocation” is probably a better description) is to prepare the vanguard category and lead it in the final revolution against the present system, usually involving one or another form of “direct action”. The professional revolutionary’s work can cover various activities: determining useful slogans, writing and distributing propaganda/agitational materials, arranging and accumulating financing for the organization, creating/training/maintaining a paramilitary force of the party in expectation of the revolution, or analyzing the present situation in order to better assess the best tactics in the current context. Additional work could include forming links and connections with other disgruntled categories in society (for tactical alliances), forming links with vanguard organizations in other countries (or through international organizations) for the purposes of training and/or coordinating activities against common foes, and sundry other types of activities. While any given professional revolutionary may have certain specializations or particularly useful skills, s/he can be shifted to where the vanguard party organization needs aid the most. While an isolated existence is not necessarily a requirement for this function, in practice many professional revolutionaries must live “underground”, either because of authoritarian surveillance by the state or because the various criminal activities involved in revolutionary work have brought the entire organization under the scrutiny of security forces.<sup>17</sup> The professional revolutionaries, therefore, serve as the core of the vanguard party organization; while non-professionals can hold some important positions in the organization (for instance, those serving as representatives in legislative bodies), the professional revolutionaries provide the necessary guidance to keep the party on its “historic” mission.

Third, the vanguard party organization must serve as *the advanced wing of the vanguard category itself*. It cannot be a spontaneous organization, nor can it be a party somehow separate and/or autonomous from the privileged group; to be the “vanguard of the vanguard”, it must be *of*, not *above*, the epistemologically-privileged category.<sup>18</sup> The main factor that distinguishes the vanguard party organization as the “advanced wing” of the epistemologically-privileged category is its grasp of the “science” of History. As noted above, distinguishing the vanguard party from the mass of the vanguard category is the understanding of the “true” dynamics directing human interaction. Being the “advanced wing” means grasping this “science” and *being able to translate it into practical action*. The vanguard party is not populated, therefore, merely by the “theoreticians” of the vanguard

class – articulating its interests and final ends – but rather by those who can use “science” to formulate strategies, tactics, and measures to move the “habitual” category, mired in false consciousness, to true category-consciousness, revolutionary activity, and final victory over the forces of society and the Enemy category. “Science” with action legitimates the vanguard party organization as the advanced wing of the privileged category.

Being the advanced wing of the epistemologically-privileged category, the interests and aims of the vanguard party organization are *merged and subsumed under the “true” interests of the vanguard category*. As the “true” interests of party and category are identical, it cannot and must not have interests separate from or inimical to that of the category. In this manner, the vanguard party organization maintains its revolutionary credentials and its claim to “science”. Internal to the organization, this focus tends to push it more toward radicalism or extremism. Elements within the organization that become too blatantly oligarchic (in Robert Michels’ sense; see Michels 1962), insofar as they become more ideologically “bland” or gradualist, will tend to be purged. If they are not, the organization will likely shift its general structure as well as its ideology in a non-vanguardist direction, perhaps even becoming a more typical political party.

Additionally, being the advanced wing of the epistemologically-privileged category means that *the vanguard party is not essentially superior to the mass of the category itself*. This attribute does not mean that the vanguard party organization lacks some form of elitism (explicit or implicit). However, there is a strict notion of category egalitarianism; in other words, inequalities between members of the category are, for the most part, differences in degree, while the inequality between category members and non-members is one of a kind. Population members are all equals, as they are superior to other groups, with the main purpose of the vanguard party organization being to lead the epistemologically-privileged category to fulfill its world-historic mission. “To lead”, naturally, requires that the mass *ought to follow*. Regardless of whatever egalitarian principles may undergird an ideology, leadership presupposes some type of elitism. But while the vanguard party organization and its professional revolutionaries may be “superior” to any single empirical instance of the epistemologically-privileged category (in other words, a randomly selected member of the category’s mass), the party is *never* superior to the category as a whole.

It is important to note that the vanguard party itself generally attaches itself to a larger, more broadly based movement. On its own, the vanguard party would be viewed as too extreme, too narrow, and too potentially violent to gain general support. Instead, vanguard parties often are the more extreme “wing” of a larger movement, which can include movements that overlap significantly with the vanguard party’s own views (such as some of the social democratic movements in the earlier twentieth century), or movements that overlap equivocally with the vanguard party where issues of language or other social trends can provide an opportunity for the vanguard group to gain entry (such as more explicitly racist

vanguardists linking themselves with broader nationalist movements). For the larger social movement, the vanguard party may present problems, as it provides an example of the radicalism of the movement for opponents, but also presents benefits: the vanguard party can serve as a “conscience” to the movement that is not mired in opportunism or compromise, the vanguard party can engage in extreme (even violent) activities that members of the broader movement may appreciate but cannot (publicly) condone, and the vanguard party is a useful “bargaining chip” for the movement in engaging with others (where the vanguard “extremists” can be compared to the movement’s more “moderate” aims). The danger for the broader social movement is when the vanguard party gains ascendancy, be it through violent action (as in the October Revolution) or through institutional maneuvers (in the case of Hitler’s appointment to Chancellor); upon achieving power, most vanguard parties, when possible, will purge out the more “moderate” elements of the movement as a means of solidifying power and avoiding “backsliding” away from social revolution.<sup>19</sup>

The final notable element with most vanguard parties is the ambiguous perspective on the political realm. For almost all vanguard groups, politics is not the driving force/dynamic of society. In Hitler’s words,

the state represents no end, but a means. It is, to be sure, the premise for the formation of a higher human culture, but it is not the cause, which lies exclusively in the existence of a race capable of culture. [emphasis removed]  
(Hitler 1999 [1927]: 391)

Rather, the dynamics connected to the epistemologically-privileged group (class and economics; nation and international interaction; race and “purity”) are the “real” motors of History. While these organizations may talk about “putting politics in the driver’s seat”, rather than leaving the political realm to other forces, this use of politics is for the purpose of advancing the vanguard’s main goals rather than from the idea that politics alone is somehow superior. Political control, as with right action, is a matter of instrumentalism. Political revolution, while important, is at best only part of the larger, and vastly more important, social revolution that will remake all human interaction. As Tucker explains (in the case of Marxism), “Without ever slighting the significance of the political dimension, Marx ... always saw *social* revolution as the fundamental revolutionary fact” [emphasis in original] (Tucker 1969: 10–11). And yet, for most vanguard groups, a central reason for their existence is the gaining and maintaining of political power; indeed, while propaganda and mobilization of the “historic” category population is a major part of these groups’ work, seizing political power remains the core task of the vanguard.

How can we explain this anomaly? Marx provides us with a good method to find the solution. What does “social revolution” mean in the case of Marx? Simply put, it is “a change in the mode of production with consequent change of all

subordinate elements in the social complex” (Tucker 1969: 15). For all vanguard groups, this change of social interrelationships (“modes of production” in Marxist terminology) is the main aim of the social revolution. Politics becomes important, then, not because the political is the central dynamic of History, but rather because control over the political realm – and especially the coercive apparatus of the state – is highly conducive toward bringing about the “real” social revolution. With state power, the vanguard can remove the “fetters” against historical progress inherent in present institutions. Moreover, the infrastructure and various agencies of the state – even if they are destined to be completely remodeled or destroyed – provide the vanguard party with avenues to raise category consciousness and mobilize the masses that would likely be impossible for the organization itself. As the social revolution entails changing social relations and, in effect, the very social way-of-being between individuals and groups, the state apparatus gives the vanguard party a greater ability to influence and revolutionize cultural institutions and practices that in themselves are not part of the state.

Perhaps most important of all, however, control of the state provides the vanguard organization with a straightforward and simple means to combat “counter-revolutionary” forces, in particular those of the dread Enemy category. Seizure of the state provides this opportunity in two ways. First, most vanguard organizations view the state as actively assisting the Enemy category in the vanguard category’s historical struggle against it. By taking the state into the hands of the vanguard party (and by extension, the vanguard category), the Enemy category loses one of its major means of maintaining hegemony: the “pistol” that is the state is taken from the grasp of the “oppressors” and held firmly in hand by the “oppressed”. Second, the vanguard party can use the coercive instruments of the state to combat the inevitable reaction of “counter-revolutionary” forces in its many forms, which could include: military/police action by officers of the state loyal to the Enemy category; “foot-dragging” by Enemy category members in various spheres of society; sabotage; terror attacks; spreading “misinformation” and hysteria among the population in general as well as the vanguard category specifically; and potentially any other type activity that could disrupt and/or destroy the rising hegemony of the privileged category and its party. Against such overwhelming activity by the Enemy category, the vanguard party must seize political power as a defensive measure. As the Enemy category and its state ally will commit “provocations” against the epistemologically-privileged category, the vanguard organization is simply acting in a defensive manner by taking the state and proceeding to disarm and de-power the Enemy category. The “counter-revolutionary” acts of the Enemy, of course, cannot be considered “defensive” in any mitigating sense; the Enemy category is “defending” its power only in the same sense that a robber “defends” his ill-gotten gains when the proper owners come to take their goods. The seizure of power, therefore, is not the main aim of vanguard parties as much as a means toward furthering the social revolution, which itself will lead History into the next epoch.

While these are the necessary components for the vanguard concept, there do seem to be some patterns of similar ideas between these groups that may not be linked by necessity to conceptual vanguardism. These similarities between vanguard organizations, while not appearing to be structurally necessary, do appear with some frequency. Many of these non-essential consistencies may simply reflect the similarities in the time period when these organizations formed, or they may point to ideational or structural elements that go beyond the examination of vanguardism. An excellent example of this pattern would be the highly anti-bourgeois tendency within most vanguardist groups, regardless of particular type. While this anti-bourgeois element might be downgraded as a matter of political expediency, the ideological antipathy for the bourgeoisie remains within these organizations' ideologies. Regardless of the foundational epistemologically-privileged category, vanguard organizations usually view the bourgeoisie as decadent, small-minded, easily corrupted, miserly, and similar qualities. Another notable example would be in the realm of economics. While there is little agreement between vanguardist groups about the best or most just economy, nearly all of them are unified in being vehemently anti-capitalist (understood as free market orientation). While there may be some connection between vanguardism's ideas of totality and "science" and this great discomfort with free market economics, it does not seem to be a necessary connection.

## Conclusion

The vanguard party, one of the major (but also most horrific) political innovations of the last 150 years, presents a broad structure of thought and action. Not limited to any particular "savior" class, the vanguard party structure presents a potentially successful and appealing form of organization. To see how vanguardism has influenced political developments in the twentieth century and beyond, we will investigate its various forms in the coming chapters. We will start with the "pure" vanguard system, class-vanguardism.

## Notes

- 1 For an example regarding leaders and thinkers in the Italian Fascist party, see Gregor 2005.
- 2 One could also include the work of Donatella della Porta, which compares extremist movements in Italy and Germany during the 1960s. The sociological insights of della Porta's work are beneficial, but the small amount of discussion of organization itself, mostly dedicated to analyzing the context in which such groups could operate, limits the degree of explication on organizations themselves (della Porta 1995: 104–111; 115–119).
- 3 One could also use "class-based epistemology", if one understands "class" in a taxonomic, rather than economic, sense. To avoid misunderstandings, "category" is used throughout.
- 4 A non-human category may be possible, with qualifications: the category of "God" is discussed in Chapter 8, and the category of "Earth" is discussed in the Conclusion.

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- 5 “Starting point” is meant analytically here. The development of a particular vanguard organization may begin with any of the elements described below. Moreover, the psychological motivation for its development may be based on a totalistic hatred of what exists before any particular group is identified as a “savior” category (for a possible example, see Nechaev 2004 [1869]). However, the epistemologically-privileged population is the theoretical origin for systemization and legitimation.
- 6 This form of epistemology can also be important in non-vanguardist systems, and will be discussed in greater detail in the Conclusion.
- 7 This style of epistemology should be distinguished from technocratic forms – see the brief discussion on technocracy in Chapter 3.
- 8 In practice, the redefinition of “science” can also serve as a defense against external criticism: opposing views are perceived as being based on partial or fundamentally flawed reasoning.
- 9 A metaphor may help to clarify this view. The ability of the epistemologically-privileged group to see reality’s “true” dynamics in contrast to the rest of humanity is like a person with color vision looking at a colorful Impressionist painting, while all other spectators are color-blind. The latter might see general shapes or structures, but could not see what is “really” there – only the vanguard (color-sighted) population has that ability.
- 10 This distinction is intentional. The lower-case form of “history” merely indicates passing specifics of day-to-day existence, with all of its contingencies, accidents, and ephemeral elements. The capitalized form of History, on the other hand, indicates the dynamic that drives society – it is the directional, main current of existence.
- 11 One can hear the echo of Marx and Engels against the “utopians” of their time in this form of vanguardist argument. Contrasting themselves with those who would “create” a utopia by ideas alone, vanguard partiers assert that, although voluntarist action is needed, an “end” can arise only because the dynamics of History have made such a thing a necessity.
- 12 For class-vanguards, the end of economic exploitation; for nation-vanguards, the thriving of their national culture will have world-wide benefits (such as the Renaissance); for race-vanguards, the strengthening of humanity’s genetic “stock” for survival, and so forth.
- 13 As with History, the capitalization of Enemy is purposeful. While a vanguard party may have numerous opponents at any given time, especially from “opportunistic” allied groups (patriotic parties rather than nationalistic ones, trade unions rather than communist parties), there will always remain only one Enemy. In the vanguardist view, opponents can be used and may perhaps be integrated into the movement, and are at worst contingent obstacles. The Enemy, on the other hand, is a constant and implacable entity – the capitalization denotes this particular population in vanguardist systems.
- 14 On the importance of enemies in political formations, see Evrigenis 2008.
- 15 This issue of inertia or unthinking activity arises in all vanguard groups. For instances of this view, compare Lenin 1969 [1902]: 101–108 and Hitler 1999 [1927]: 470, among many others.
- 16 This can change over time, especially for those vanguard leaders who manage to obtain full political power. Hitler, nearer the end of his regime, serves as the main example (for instance, see Kershaw 2000: 276).
- 17 Such surveillance is usually assumed by vanguard organizations as a matter of ideology as well as vanguardist structure (specifically, the assumption of the Enemy’s control of the present totality), even if the authorities are not seeking the organization, and indeed may have no knowledge of the group’s existence at all.
- 18 To be “of” the category, however, must not be taken too literally. Many of the leaders/members of vanguard party organizations are not “of” the vanguard category in any usual sense. Group loyalty is important here. By accepting the world-historic role of



the vanguard category, and accepting the “science” connected to this special role, those who are not literally of the category *might* be acceptable, albeit provisionally. If one aligns with the privileged category, that individual can join the struggle of History on the “correct” side. Moreover, they can hold key positions of influence and leadership among the “vanguard of the vanguard”. However, such outsiders, especially those who may originate in the Enemy category, will often be viewed with suspicion, and tend to appear prominently among those “purged” by vanguard parties.

- 19 The circumstances surrounding the ascension to power can make a significant difference: after the October Revolution as well as the Russian Civil War, the Bolshevik party was comparatively free to wipe away other movement elements (such as the Socialist-Revolutionaries), while in the case of Italy, the Fascist party had to move much more slowly, and with less success, as the continued acquiescence of other parties was, for a time, necessary to maintain power.

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# 3

## PREHISTORY OF VANGUARDISM

Does a man of that – of that – persuasion still remain an anarchist when alone, quite alone and going to bed, for instance? Does he lay his head on his pillow, pull his bedclothes over him, and go to sleep with the necessity of the *chambardement général*, as the French slang has it, of the general blow-up, always present to his mind?

*(Conrad 1982[1908]: 389)*

As with all forms of political organization, once there was a time when vanguardism “was not”. While one can find similarities, and perhaps even more direct connections, with other forms of elite-driven political organization, vanguardism as a developed political form did not come into existence until the late nineteenth century at the earliest. Here, we will focus on the factors that made vanguardism a reality in the political realm. But note that this is not meant as a determinist form of argument; these factors made vanguardism a viable possibility, but not a necessity. Whether or not vanguardist forms of organization could have been avoided in this time period – while an interesting question – is not an issue with which we are concerned.

The prehistory of vanguardism does not reveal direct causation between earlier modes of organization and thinking leading to the vanguardist system, in a manner reminiscent of some of the authors noted in the Introduction. Rather, one sees a constellation of influences arising and overlapping in time, where this combination provided the context in which vanguardism developed. Richard Shorten’s recent work is instructive on this point, particularly in his distinction between “affinities” and “influences”:

“Affinity” means that there is a “genuine similarity in essential features between antecedent object and projected outcome”... “Influence” is far

more easily identified with a causal role. Influence makes something eligible to be considered a source if it can be shown that “one man was directly influenced in his outlook by the writings of another”.

*(Shorten 2012: 77–78; see also Gray 2014: 525–526)*

Throughout the discussion of prehistory here, aspects of both affinity and influence will be noticeable. But rather than an in-depth analysis of these various points – which would require a book in itself – this chapter will deal broadly with some of these factors.

In this examination of vanguardism’s development, we will only look at those factors closer to its arrival temporally. This should not be viewed as denying the influence of larger or more long-standing dynamics; a full genealogy of vanguardism would need to go far back into history, noting elements such as millennialism (see Cohn 1970) and structural similarities to Gnostic sects, among others (Jonas 1963; Stoyanov 2000), similar to Kołakowski’s discussion on ancient antecedents to Marxism (2005: 13–34). For this work, we will limit ourselves to the central influences of the last two and a half centuries. Additionally, this overview will leave other contributing elements to the side, including the mass appeal for action surrounding the war for Greek independence between 1821 to 1832 (see, for instance, Schumacher 2014: 66–69; Glencross 1997; Schwartzberg 1988), or the broader ramifications of changes in earlier periods (Reformation, Counter-Reformation, the ongoing influence of Rousseau), among others.

The factors discussed here also influenced other, non-vanguardist ideologies and organizations. For instance, these elements also contributed to the development of technocratic notions of political organization, with notable “borderline” cases between vanguardist and technocratic theories including the positivist “religion of humanity” and its organization as described by Auguste Comte, as well as the theories of Saint-Simon. While Comte’s view especially shares very strong similarities with vanguard ideology – in terms of its directional notion of History, its dedication to a “science” of sociology, and organization – what it lacked was a clear population category upon which his system could rest. Rather than a mass category of some type serving as the foundation and strength of his vanguard to a new society, the scientifically “enlightened” made up both the category and the “vanguard”. As such, it was not a vanguard group in the sense here described, but rather a technocratic formulation. Other utopian, yet influential, thinkers who influenced vanguardism without necessarily being vanguardist in the sense described here, such as Charles Fourier, could also be included (see Gardiner 1995). While these thinkers and movements have some influence upon vanguardist developments, they are comparatively tangential and thus will not be addressed here.

In the confluence of factors in which vanguardism arose, we can point to six influences of major importance. First is the appearance of the Jacobins in the period of the French Revolution as a proto-vanguard. Second is the ideological

formations created through the theories of Hegel and Marx, emphasizing the role of History as well as the central importance of specific populations for History's climax. Third is the growth of "mass society" and the related rise of various forms of mass-oriented, elite-centered theories. Fourth is the increasing importance of political violence in a revolutionary vein. Fifth is the increased importance of scientism in popular and political language, emphasizing a shift from "moral norms" to "scientific facts" for political discourse. Sixth, and finally, the first "crisis of Marxism" in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century, combined with the event that was the First World War, provided the environment in which vanguardism could grow. It is at this point where the theorists, such as Sorel, and practitioners, including Lenin and Mussolini, become highly important. We will consider each of these elements in turn.

### Example and Exemplar: The Proto-Vanguard of Jacobinism

Although not a vanguard organization itself, the Jacobins of the French Revolution, specifically their activities leading up to and during the period during the Terror of 1794, provided a key example for later vanguardists, as well as a notable instance of the structure and imperatives driving vanguard organizations. Additionally, the French Revolution provided inspiration and examples for later vanguard parties that other revolutions – most especially, the American Revolution of 1776 – lacked. While the American Revolution might be viewed as an ideological and political revolution, it was not a fully *social* revolution, at least in the sense of continental Europe: many of the targeted structures for social revolution, particularly hereditary nobility and entrenched religious institutions, did not exist in any real measure within the Anglo-American colonies. The French Revolution, in contrast, provided an example of revolution in the "fullest" sense, especially under the leadership of the Jacobins:

To justify what really mattered to them – first, the advancement or the retrogression of the Revolution at any given moment; and second, the suppression or encouragement of popular revolutionaries – both progressive and retrogressive Jacobins knew precisely which kind of argument they should use.

(Higonnet 1998: 42)

The Jacobins, particularly at their most extreme under the *Comité de salut public*, provided an inspiration and object lesson for later vanguardist organizations who wished to bring their own parties into power. One can see proto-elements of vanguardism through the Jacobin rise to power, as well as in the challenges it faced and the avenues used to gain victory; moreover, Jacobin methods could be described as the first to have a "new concept of terrorism as a form of revolutionary struggle" (Erlenbusch 2015: 202).<sup>1</sup> By exhibiting the ability of a party (or, for

the time period, a “faction”) to mobilize the population to gain political control, then magnify the influence of the party to solidify full power over the political apparatus – as well as showing where the party did not go far enough in order to maintain its political position – the vanguard parties of the future attempted to learn from Jacobin victories and mistakes. More broadly, the Jacobins also presented an example of a party that emphasizes the totalism of its mission, as a means of “regenerating” man, as well as the connected creation of the Enemy category. In his defense of the enhanced powers of the Jacobin government, Robespierre said:

Revolutionary government needs extraordinary activity, precisely because it is at war. It is subject to less uniform and less rigorous rules, because the circumstances in which it exists are stormy and shifting, and above all because it is continually forced to deploy new resources rapidly, to confront new and pressing dangers. ... Revolutionary government owes good citizens full national protection; to enemies of the people it owes nothing but death.

(Robespierre 2007 [1793]: 99)

We also see the combination of Manichaeism and totalism regarding the Enemy, here broadly seen as the “Old Regime”. For instance, the left-Jacobins’ tendency to blame the massacres by popular uprisings in September 1792 not on the perpetrators, but rather as being “caused” by the “depravity” of the previous regime (or because the prisoners were concocting a “plot” against the revolution) echoes consistently in vanguardist language (see Higonnet 1998: 37–41).

Speaking as the self-declared representatives of “the People” and “the Revolution”, the Jacobins increasingly relied on a *partiinost* view of themselves to distinguish the “just” from the “counter-revolutionary”. This party spirit – a typical and necessary element of vanguardist parties – paradoxically arose from the fear of lack of unity in the society (from the “ever-living factions” [“Letter of the Committee ...” 1982 [1794]: 211]) and its dangers to the Revolution. As the Jacobins increasingly faced challenges, the determination of acceptability slides from action to existence (in other words, to a proto-form of the category-based view of the Enemy): specifically, who you *are* defines you as just, rather than what you *do*.

Its means were the gradual suspension of law. Its driving motive was the hatred of faction. Its mainspring was the moralization of politics and the demonization of Jacobinism’s enemies ... Its words came from the hegemonic assemblage of formulaic recipes that were taking on a demonic life of their own.

(Higonnet 1998: 47)

As such, in the name of the People, the party takes on sole control of the means of state coercion. Even the comparative “moderates” of the Jacobin group could

not accept the idea of other groups actually holding power to rule (see Higonnet 1998: 66–67). Centralization became key:

This centralization had two roots: first, the system of affiliation with departmental clubs that the Paris Jacobin Club had extended by the Year II into a procedure for maintaining orthodoxy in the provinces; and second, the tightly structured institutions of the *gouvernement révolutionnaire* which were codified in the law of 14 frimaire Year II (December 1793). The revolutionary government, whose hub was the Committee of Public Safety, attempted to coordinate everything, and to repress what it could not control.

(Woloch 1970: 7)

The totalistic control of the government by the party would mean less systemization of law, and greater oppression of the Enemy.

While underdeveloped theoretically – focused mostly on an indeterminate “Progress” and an unclear “regeneration of man” – the Jacobin notion of History did share the vanguardist characteristic of an imperative to move toward the final goal. This need for constant movement toward the full revolution is notable especially beginning in 1791, when “Orthodox Jacobins were convinced that unless the Revolution moved forward, it would collapse, and with it the dream of regenerated man” (Higonnet 1998: 15). One can also see the beginnings of *patriinost* as it would extend to following part leadership in the Jacobin clubs, as they “...felt they had the right, indeed the duty to comment on pending legislation such as that regarding inheritance. But once the deputies in Paris had reached a definitive decision, obedience was theoretically mandatory” (Kennedy 1982: 245). We also see the subsuming of party to State, as occurs in some vanguardist groups:

Under the Revolutionary government of the Terror, elections all but ceased, and membership in a Popular Society became virtually a *sine qua non* for holding public office. Yet, paradoxically, at the zenith of their power, the clubs lost much of their independence and became mere cogs in the administrative machine.

(Kennedy 1982: 302)

The Jacobins shared many traits with later vanguardist organizations, but one must look at them as “proto-vanguards” rather than a full example of this ideological/organizational structure. On a societal level, the Jacobins could not become vanguards because of the lack of mass politics in late eighteenth-century France; mobilization of the population was possible in specific areas – such as Paris – but the technological and literacy prerequisites for mass politics simply did not exist at the time. On a more fundamental level, the Jacobins lacked the fully developed ideological prerequisites for a vanguardist system, even while moving in a vanguardist direction organizationally. This underdevelopment is best reflected in

the lack of any “science” used by the Jacobins; sharing with many Enlightenment movements a focus on “Reason”, what such “Reason” entailed outside of a more modern perspective on rights and a vague scientific emphasis was at best unclear. While lacking in systematic rigor, the Jacobins maintained zeal of a totalistic nature. Perhaps the most important missing element, however, was the lack of strict population categorization by the Jacobins; speaking for “the People” and supporting a vague “regeneration of Man”, the party lacked a specific, targeted population from which to gain support and legitimacy. As “the People” included a disparate commingling of social and economic classes, and as a categorical nationalism had not yet developed,<sup>2</sup> the Jacobins were in some ways before their time. As Fehér explains,

In the Jacobin interpretation, “republic” comprised two substantive elements. Firstly, it was seen as coextensive with “society”, the collective will which stood in contrast to the individual’s ambition, greed, egoism. Secondly, it was seen to be the embodiment and purveyor of virtue, in contrast to all political enemies of the Revolution, who appeared “corrupt” and “immoral” in the mirror of moralized politics and politicized morals. Therefore, while the nation was the incarnation of the *volonté générale* both for Sièyes and Robespierre, in the dictatorship the term assumed a new dimension.

(Fehér 1987: 59)

As the organizational development of the Jacobin party increasingly became vanguardist in structure, the lack of a vanguardist ideological foundation – one that could mobilize a part of mass society against others – would become the party’s Achilles’ heel. Increasingly, the Jacobin revolutionary government would suffer from its lack of an ideological infrastructure to legitimize its powers and activities.

In a sense, however, the underdevelopment of an ideological foundation for the Jacobins created one other overlapping trait between their organization and later vanguardist parties; the ongoing emphasis on, and need for, “action” (or “praxis”). Ideology – even an ideology of “Reason” – will often take a secondary role compared to “action”, insofar as action can serve to increase legitimacy through concrete results, even if ideological justification may still be lacking. As Robespierre neatly summarized the demands of right action:

No, all the good you have done was a rigorous duty. The omission of good which you can do would be a breach of trust, the harm you would be doing a crime of *lèse-nation* and *lèse-humanity*. There is more: unless you do everything for liberty, you have done nothing. There are no two ways of being free: one must be entirely free, or become a slave once more. *The least resource left to despotism will soon restore its power.* [emphasis added]

(Robespierre 2007 [1791]: 9)



In the end, the Jacobin party had a significant vanguardist organization, reinforced by its emphasis on action in combat against a totalistic Enemy, but lacked a substantive ideological foundation – and, more importantly, lacked a concrete mass population – to maintain itself in power.

The failure of the Jacobin period of the French Revolution, and the human cost of the Terror, would not eliminate its importance as an influence, both for active revolutionaries as well as for intellectuals focused on social changes. Hegel was markedly influenced by the French Revolution. As one commenter notes,

neither the experience of the Terror nor the critical insight into the Revolution's inability to come to any positive and stable political solutions were able to turn Hegel into its opponent. For him, the positive mastery of the political problems that arose with it in history remained the task before which the age was unconditionally set. Hegel always affirmatively accepted the French Revolution.

*(Ritter 1982 [1969]: 46)*

In fact, “from 1806 to 1813 Hegel adopted a line of wholehearted support of the French and violently opposed the German nationalist movement as well as the anti-French insurrection of 1813” (Avineri 1972: 35). The influence of the French Revolution on Marx's views is also well known, and with works such as “The Holy Family”, “[t]he portrayal of the French Revolution as a triumph of the bourgeoisie over the nobility and the onset of a capitalist social and economic system ... was central to Marx's view of politics and to his criticism of the Young Hegelians” (Sperber 2013: 163). It is to these two theorists, and their influences on the vanguardist views of History and the epistemologically-privileged population, that we now turn.

## History and the World-Historic Population

Hegel and Marx fundamentally reshaped the idea of “History”, to the extent that even those vanguard groups that do not explicitly rely on these authors in effect still use their categories, methods, and form of understanding. Creating a unique view of history, where there is a directional, necessary end to history without a “purpose”, a determinism without teleology, these theorists of History provided the means for ideologists of various population categories to claim scientific rigor for their prophecies and legitimacy for their right to rule. The ecumenical nature of these views of Hegel, and partially also of Marx, is illustrated in the striking number of vanguardists who initially follow one of these theorists who will move to the other over time, be it in the case of the nation-vanguard philosopher Giovanni Gentile, or in the case of Lukács, using the same theorists but in defense of the “world-historic” position of different categories. It should be noted that

the following discussion does not claim to have the “correct” interpretations of Hegel or Marx (should such interpretations actually exist); rather, I will focus upon those interpretations and understandings that have been the most influential in vanguardist development.<sup>3</sup>

There are two major elements in Hegel’s work with profound influence on later vanguardist development. First is the system of dialectics, in particular as presented in his *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (*Phenomenology of Spirit*). This system (“method” is a better term) accomplished numerous things: linking the noumenal world to the world of phenomenon, giving process and Becoming pride of place over that of existence and Being, explicating how contradiction is not only a reality but indeed a central necessity in the process of reality, and his explication of History (expounded in more detail in *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte*) moving through the dialectical process toward a specific, necessary end that simultaneously was *not* teleological in a normal sense. While couched in an esoteric and often nearly inexplicable manner, Hegel’s dialectics provided the bridge between the numerous and totalistic modern ideologies that were developing on the one hand, with the increasing tendency toward mass political action and mobilization on the other. Idea and action could now be linked in a manner that could be acceptable to both the theorist and the practitioner. Circumventing Kant’s antinomies, the distinction between the visible/material/determinist (the “mathematical”) versus the invisible/immaterial/voluntarist (the “dynamical”) vanishes, or as Hegel put it famously, “Was vernünftig ist, das ist Wirklich; und was wirklich ist, das ist vernünftig” (“What is rational is actual; and what is actual is rational”) (Hegel 1991 [1820]: 20). The connection between noumena and phenomena becomes the process of dialectics, with contradiction surpassed in *Aufhebung* into a new, full whole.

*Negation* is the motive force of the system; things are known by what they lack, by what they do not fulfill. ... The meaning of negation is *Aufhebung*: the passing over of an entity into its *other* (that which it is not) as a fulfilling of the inner potential of the thing. ... The new object is not the nullification of the old, but the fulfillment of the old and even retains the worthwhile qualities of its predecessor; *negation* is not destruction but development. [emphasis in original]

(Gross 1976: 270)

Through this style of reasoning, Hegel provides a system that is holistic in its purview, where contradiction and conflict are not outliers or lacunae but rather intrinsic elements within the process of reality itself.

Second, and perhaps most importantly, Hegel provides the framework for the type of category-based epistemology upon which vanguardism has its basis. Pinkard provides a useful summation of this contribution:

Although we may think universal thoughts, we must will particular actions. Therefore, we must will something determinate if we are to act at all. One way of getting determinate content for the will would be simply to act on our straightforward desires. On Hegel's interpretation of freedom, however, that would not count as completely free willing. Since our desires are not fully posited by us, they cannot be the basis for an adequate conception of free willing. We must will something determinate, but it must coincide with our system of valuations. Indeed, it is when our motivationally efficacious desires coincide with our valuations that we are free. The determinate unities of motivationally efficacious desires and valuations constitute the proper objects of the will. These proper objects, however, are found *within determinate types of social life*. The unions of desire and valuation must be interpreted in terms of particular historical forms of communal living. [emphasis added]

(Pinkard 1988: 122–123)

This formulation of “social categories”, focused on action but easily expanded to knowledge, is the foundation for the vanguardist idea of epistemology.

But these are not merely categories into which the labors of civil society are divided analytically or even the mere distribution of positive rights. More important, it is only in and through these concrete estates and corporations that individuals find themselves, find their identities within the whole society and state.

(Walker 1978: 249)

In contrast to individualistic forms of theorizing, where the autonomous individual of theory stands somewhat outside (and perhaps above) the historical process, Hegel's focus upon determinate forms of social existence developing within, as well as influencing, History strikes a significantly new note.

The political relevance of this change is significant. Instead of looking for an eternal law, or attempting to explain why the perfect state does not yet exist, the ideologist could now explain the viability of his views via the ongoing process/dynamic of History: “Contrary to Kant, Hegel united morality and ethics with the social bonds of custom, language, legal right, and culture in his concept of *Sittlichkeit* – ‘ethics’ in the broadest sense, or ‘ethical life’” (Crites 1998: 224). Even concrete facts that would appear directly to contradict the ideology now transform into confirmation of the view via its re-articulation as a necessary “contradiction” in the dialectical process: any specific “fact”, in a sense, becomes secondary to the overarching “tendency” from History. For Hegel, the dynamic of History is primarily time-based, where certain civilizations and/or individuals hold “world-historic” importance, serving (often unwittingly) the “cunning of

reason”; later, in the works of Marx, the time-based nature of the dynamics of History would merge with a focus on a particular *part* (class, group) of society.

Philosophical historians proposed ... a theory of ‘historical periodization’ which would reveal the main stages of development in man’s growth to higher levels of self-consciousness. The urge to place different societies on a scale of ascending types is exhibited both in Hegel’s analysis of world-historical peoples and in Marx’s consideration of various forms of socially-organized production.

(Linklater 1981: 32)

Here, we turn to Marx: his shift from Hegel’s institutional focus to one of populations provides the main start for the vanguardist notion of History. For practitioners of still-budding mass politics, Hegel’s theories provided a means of universalizing the desires of a specific class or group; rather than only petitioning to benefit one segment of society (domestic or international), now the practitioner could place his/her preferred group as an actor – perhaps even a world-historic one – in the necessary “progress” of History. Political disputes, then, would not be a matter of competing aims and interests, but instead a universal drama of “progress” and “reason” versus the forces of “regression” and “reaction”. With Marx, the time-based “nation” becomes both time-based and class/category-based.

Although Marx is usually associated with vanguardist organizations explicitly basing themselves on Marxist ideology – including various Leninist and Maoist groups – Marx’s influence on vanguardism generally is extensive. Even those groups specifically arguing against the class-based vanguardism of Marxist groups still use some elements of Marxian methodology and even terminology, changing the central group to “nation” or “race” but maintaining the general ideational structure. In terms of Marx’s contributions, we will focus on four things: his transformation of Hegelianism from the metaphysical to the material; his connection of the “world-historic” populations of the *Geist* to a specific population/category as an advancement upon Hegel’s social categorizations; his emphasis on the role of *social* revolution in this process; and explicating the inherently negative totality of what currently exists.

The greatest contribution of Marx to the notion of History and its connection with vanguardism is his move to identify a specific category of the population – the proletariat – as the necessary element in the progression of History itself. Instead of being limited to a certain world-historic individual or institutions, Marx made the “vital” element of the movement of History a “people”. Unlike the Jacobins, however, Marx’s “people” was not an abstract and potentially universalistic population, but instead was a limited, concrete, and particularistic group, even if a “universal subject” (in his terminology). Marx would be in agreement with Hegel, insofar

As Hegel would put it, the subjectivity of personal conviction is not enough to confer a *moral* status on one's principles. One must go beyond one's subjectivity to a notion of public, shared principles. This distinction can be made only if one brings in an understanding of accepted rules and practices. [emphasis in original]

(Pinkard 1988: 136)

The difference would be what this "public" entails: instead of a basis on a political unit, Marx's view focused on the economic unit and (sub)population. While the general foundations for the vanguardist notion of History already exist with Hegel, Marx pulls these ideas out of the Hegelian abstractions of "Spirit" and "State", instead placing them in a more concrete realm of classes and processes. This change is tremendously important; by modifying a highly abstract and metaphysical system into one with materialistic processes and a "scientific" understanding, Marx opened the door for various vanguard ideologies to use Hegel's method without the barriers of Hegel's metaphysics. Even if some of these claims about the empirical processes of economics or technological development were questionable at best, the broader ideology that could (theoretically) explain "everything" in a manner not unlike (but also not the same as) the physical sciences would have a great appeal in an increasingly scientific age.

As a social group instead of an institution is the vital element for Marx, so too did social revolution hold pride of place above political revolution. Here again, Marx is similar to the Jacobins in their desire for "regeneration". For Marx, as well as for later vanguard organizations, social revolution – ongoing and totalistic – must be the primary aim of the revolutionary category (and its party). Only when human beings are fully transformed, and when the "reactionary" institutions and individuals are eliminated by one means or another, can the true end of History be reached, for "[t]he proletariat, the lowest stratum of our present society, cannot stir, cannot raise itself up, without the whole superincumbent strata of official society being sprung up into the air" (Marx and Engels 1978 [1888]: 482). A fully "new man" and "new society" would arise from the total social revolution, wiping away the horror of the present. The "true" revolutionary population cannot merely change some part of the present society; all of the present totality must be destroyed to make way for the new, perfect society.

It is here, finally, that Marx etched into the ideological "DNA" of vanguardist movements the presumption of the negative totality of the current world, in contrast to Hegel's theory of the world as moving toward fuller development (imperfect, but not horrific). In the case of Marx, the proletariat faced a dark and horrific present existence; in Marx's words on capital accumulation,

It establishes an accumulation of misery, corresponding with accumulation of capital. Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time

accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation, at the opposite pole, i.e., on the side of the class that produces its own product in the form of capital.

*(Marx 1978 [1887]: 431)*

As the proletariat was the most oppressed class in human history, and thus the truly “universal” class, by having a fully “universal” experience, it also held a “universal” mission for regeneration. To paint this theoretical picture, Marx by necessity had to show that the current era was not only repressive, but significantly more repressive than any previous era. While this may seem a minor point, it has major consequences in both theory and practice. On the theoretical side, such a Manichaeism and totalistic negativity of the present leads to an inherently instrumentalist form of activity and morality: all actions to end the current horror are rational (or even “moral”), all actions – subjective or objective – that continue or strengthen the present are unjust and irrational. On the practical side, this Manichaeism leads to a severe dehumanization of opposing groups, or even neutral groups (such as peasants) that lack the proper level of revolutionary “vigor”. A class/population that seeks to maintain and perpetuate such a negative, irrational, and ghastly present totality is not merely an opponent, but an implacable Enemy that must be removed – not merely for the benefit of the revolutionary group, but for humanity in general. This assumption of negative present need not depend on Marx’s economically focused theory, however; while his explication points to the progressive, then retrogressive development of capitalism, others could see the negative totality as the result of national decadence, racial degeneration, or environmental chaos from technological development.

One final legacy of Hegelianism and Marxism to the vanguardist notion of History may be the ability of dialectics to avoid falsifiability while claiming a level of scientific (even if broadly understood) rigor. Based upon dialectics, the appearance of evidence contrary to these style of theories is dismissed as unreflective of the inherent contradictions in reality, or as ignoring broader “trends” and “tendencies” based upon a collection of insignificant “facts”. In effect, no failed Marxian act (or successful act that leads to horror) attaches to Marxism itself, but only to flawed interpretations. Presumably, the only “true” Marxism is that which is successful – this notion of “true” ideology being the successful one, and the constant moves to “airbrush” the past to ensure this notion, is particularly strong with Marxism, but also notable in other similar ideologies. Similarly, this style of theorizing has proven adept at delegitimizing opposing views as irrational:

For Marxist intellectuals, any individual or movement that failed to anticipate the imminent collapse of capitalism and the advent of the proletarian revolution was deemed irrational, incapable of the most elementary

rationality. For a Marxist like Gramsci, any ideology other than Marxism could only be contradictory and irrational.

*(Gregor 2005: 6)*

But a vanguardist ideology, even one with the appearance of infallibility, needs a population to become active. We now turn to importance of mass politics, and the relation between mass and leaders for the epistemologically-privileged category.

### **The Problems of Mass Politics, and the Solutions of Elite Theory**

Social categories of life took on a new, and more concrete, meaning as the eighteenth century progressed. In this changing social environment, possibilities for mass action that were unavailable became feasible. An environmental factor that was lacking in the Jacobin period, and was only starting to become prominent in the period of Hegel and Marx, was that of “mass society”. Defining mass society itself is challenging, as these definitions often are framed in normative language:

The mass is the assemblage of persons not specifically qualified. ... The mass is the average man. In this way what was mere quantity – the multitude – is converted into a qualitative determination: it becomes the common social quality, man as undifferentiated from other men, but as repeating in himself a generic type.

*(Ortega y Gasset 1932: 13–14)<sup>4</sup>*

Among other points, mass politics denotes increased literacy in the general population, the spread of more advanced communication technology; greater ability – through technology and infrastructure improvements – for transportation; increased life-spans in significant parts of the population; increased economic and technological productivity; and finally, the increased influence of “people” in politics and political consideration. The “people” in the new mass age, however, were not a unified whole – the “people” increasingly became a factor of importance to political decision-making, but did so as workers, bourgeoisie, Catholics, Protestants, nationals of various stripes, and a host of other identities. In a sense, the masses could move (political) mountains, but how could they achieve direction toward a common end? Without mass society, vanguard parties cannot exist. In this way, the Jacobins in practice and Hegel in theory could not articulate or practice a truly “vanguardist” ideology or party. Both could articulate some broader notion of society, one that would become the grounds for masses to operate, but at their stages in time could only see this society as populated by “the People” or articulated in “the State”. With the proletariat, Marx makes explicit the connection of mass to History. Mass society, of course, need not view societal

differences via a vanguardist perspective: it is in mass society where both the vanguardist as well as others find opportunities.

Two interrelated factors that helped create the elements of mass society were industrialization/modernization, and the solidification of the nation as a collective identity. Changes from industrialization were not limited to technological advancements or expansions of capital and credit; rather, they also included the maintenance and systematizing of large numbers of individuals within organizations that could spread across a state, or even across state boundaries. In terms of organization, what previously was the theory (if not always the practice) of larger militaries or of the Catholic Church became the experience of numerous firms across the West, and the concern of those employed by them. Where once there were craftsmen of particular places within particular traditions, now were the “mass-ified” employees – interchangeable units – within a larger corporation of an extended “industry”. While modernization worked to homogenize populations as “cogs” in a larger system, national identity provided the primary example of a mass identity that could motivate the “mass”. As Benedict Anderson notes,

If nation-states are widely conceded to be “new” and “historical,” the nations to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past, and, still more important, glide into a limitless future. It is the magic of nationalism to turn chance into destiny.

*(Anderson 2016: 11–12)*

This style of identity created pressures that simultaneously pushed toward forms of centralization and decentralization: specifically, decentralization of nations from broader transnational political units (such as the Ottoman or Austro-Hungarian Empires) while emphasizing centralization within the nation itself. In other words, these “imagined communities” sought self-determination from other nations while desiring unitary government within their own identity-defined borders.

Mass society increased the focus upon “the people” as being key for the political legitimization primarily, and as a force in itself for political action as well. But, in addition, there followed an interest and investigation of elites within this new mass form of society. Not focusing on elites necessarily in a conspiratorial manner of an “Illuminati” (for instance, see Walker 2014; but also see Arendt 1968: 84–87) – where one searches for who is “really” in control of decisions – these theorists instead examined and popularized the structural role of leaders/elites and how they interact with mass society. Among the most notable of these elite theorists are Gustave Le Bon, Geatano Mosca, Vilfredo Pareto, Robert Michels, and Georges Sorel. Their methods and conclusions had some differences, but they did share some notable similarities. One notable connection between these thinkers is the precarious connection within each one’s thought of voluntary action and determinate action: most viewed the masses as determinate, easily swayed, and unthinking. However, they also perceived some populations within the society



(the elites) as being able to exercise free will and activity, but also being dependent upon the mass population for large-scale action. Despite the variances between these thinkers, there are two broad points upon which they overlap. First, they all believe that the “irrational” plays a much larger role in the lives of individuals, societies, and politics than many previous thinkers would allow. This irrationalism cannot be eliminated in society; it is a social fact of human existence. Second, each point to small, “elite” populations as being the main drivers of civilization. For all of them, this “elite” is not a “natural aristocracy” of “the best”; instead, they variously point to structural and psychological factors in the development, populating, strengthening, and decline of ruling classes. While the Jacobins might view their own party as the “virtuous” leading “the People” to success, the elite thinkers effectively postulate a “party of virtue” without virtue. The role of the irrational and the role of elites are the two main contributions of these thinkers, albeit indirectly in some cases, to what would become vanguardism.

A unifying idea among these elite theorists is the role of the “irrational” in mass politics. Among other things, the “irrational” includes emotion and emotive language, myth as a motivating and guiding narrative, inter-group dynamics, and bonds within populations that are not “rational” in a strictly economic, instrumentalist, or even deontological sense. However, the “irrational” is not primarily defined by ignorance (as one might find in a technocratic form of elite theory); knowledge, in a real sense, is a secondary consideration. Action becomes primary, and while knowledge may be preferable, the elite theorists are in general agreement that large-scale action relies more heavily, and by necessity, upon these “irrational” elements than on reasoned discourse. Le Bon (2008 [1895]) is notable, as he popularized the understanding of the mass (or “crowd”) as acting more unconsciously than consciously. Moreover, he explicated that masses are moved by images and simple associations, which would permit a “contagion” (rather than thought-through ideas) spreading quickly through the mass. One other notable element in Le Bon’s arguments, one shared by many later vanguardists, was his belief in the inherent conservatism of the masses; while he believed that socialism had the same influence on the crowd as did earlier religions, he argued that societies’ cultures change quite gradually, where at most the names of institutions could be changed quickly, but not their actual substance. A different perspective comes from Mosca (1939). Within any developed society, he argues, the directing of the society must always come from some “organized minority”. Contra democratic theorists like Rousseau, Mosca explicates how decisions by “all citizens” are, in effect, impossible. More to the point, Mosca emphasizes the role of the irrational – specifically, ideas of a universal character, such as religion or “democracy” – in legitimating the ruling class. Pareto also emphasizes the role of the irrational, noting how most interactions are the results of “sentiments” and “derivations” (Pareto 1980), the former denoting the beliefs/intuitions people actually follow in their actions, while the latter indicates the types of post-hoc rationalizations one gives (to others and to one’s self) for the actions spawning

from sentiments. Playing into issues of democracy, Pareto argues that a significant amount of our motivating beliefs are not rational:

Men view facts through their own prejudices. And if civilized people no longer believe that the sun plunges into the ocean every evening, they harbor other beliefs that are equally unrealistic. Interpretation of facts is determined by sentiments, desires, prejudices, and interests which often unknowingly motivate action.

(Pareto 2008 [1920]: 26)

In other words, the population of mass politics – even if more literate or “learned” than earlier generation – moves according to non-rational motivations, with reason playing the role of a post-hoc rationalization.

As the masses acted without thought, the elite theorists turned to the importance of leaders and elites in the direction and use of the masses. It is important to note, however, that these elite theorists were not, for the most part, technocratic in outlook; elites were not a “separate breed” of essential difference from the mass (although any given member of an elite may have socially useful qualities).<sup>5</sup> Instead, structural elements of society, often based upon competition and conflict, would place one “elite” above another at any given time. Leadership matters, but these theorists did not view elites as Platonic “philosopher-kings” or Comte’s “high priests” of Reason. In Pareto’s words,

I use the word elite (It. *aristocrazia*) in its etymological sense, meaning the strongest, the most energetic and most capable – for good as well as evil. However, due to an important physiological law, elites do not last. Hence – the history of man is the history of the continuous replacement of certain elites: as one ascends, another declines.

(Pareto 2008: 36)

Le Bon, for instance, was not making the case that there was a “special breed” that would circumvent these issues – in his view, it did not matter whether a crowd was populated by simpletons or super-geniuses; the results would be the same – but he did note the importance of those speakers who could, like a hypnotist with someone under his sway, move crowds in certain directions. Rather, “[t]he majority of men, especially among the masses, do not possess clear and reasoned ideas on any subject whatever outside their specialty. The leader serves them as guide” (Le Bon 2008 [1895]: 57). Le Bon’s discussion focuses more on the creation of a “crowd”, but similar ideas exist among the other elite theorists regarding ruling classes. That such ruling classes exist is not a problem, in Mosca’s view, simply because they are a necessary element within human organization. Instead, it is important to have a useful (or at least not destructive) ruling class within a society. Moreover, Mosca notes the importance of ideas in the ruling class, in that “every

governing class tends to justify its actual exercise of power by resting it on some universal moral principle. This same sort of claim has come forward in our time in scientific trappings" (Mosca 1939: 62). The social fact of leadership held a central place for the elite theorists, while the ideational substance of ruling classes held at best a secondary role.

A more purely organizational formulation of these ideas comes from Robert Michels (1962). Much to his own chagrin, he made the case for the permanence of elites through his analysis of the German Social Democratic Party. While not necessarily disagreeing with some elements of the views of other elite theorists regarding the general weakness of reason, Michels' main point with his "iron law of oligarchy" was that the needs and structures of organizations *qua* organizations make elitism inevitable. Especially in the period of mass society – where increased communication and coordination become possible and desirable, but without the types of decentralized and instantaneous forms of communication available today – large-scale organizations, with inherent tendencies toward elitism, was inescapable. As a matter of political action, these changes are important:

For a movement/party to function, an infrastructure, containing a press, propaganda agents, communication links, revenue collection/allocation, and most importantly organizational offices to keep the whole thing together, was necessary. Particularly when operating underground, such an infrastructure was vital in preventing the movement/party from disintegrating into impotent splinter groups and warring mini-factions, and indeed such an organization most likely was needed to make an ambiguous "movement" into an effective party.

(Gray 2013: 656)

Indeed, Michels would note that group identification could be more complicated than was usually presented within Marxism and social democracy (Gregor 2009: 196–198).

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, are the arguments of Sorel.<sup>6</sup> Sorel in some ways is closer to Le Bon, inasmuch as he is more focused on the "masses" than on the elites, at least initially. Also, Sorel is far more interested in the role of the irrational, as he argues that "myth" is the true motivating principle in human interaction. "Myth", for Sorel, entails the images and narrative that serves to motivate a population to action (see Sorel 2004 [1950]: 124–125), with the result that movements are "presented with an alternative: either be irrational and act, or be rational and confess to mediocrity" (Horowitz 1961: 129). In this view, proletarian revolution was not driven by broader movements of Being, the overcoming of contradictions in material processes, or the pedantic analyses of Marx and later "orthodox" Marxists, but rather comes from the proletariat being motivated by the myth of "class war" and the "general strike" – to analyze whether such things

are “real” in some objective sense is, to Sorel, a mistaken form of categorization: “Myth was not part of the harmonious order of things. It was an alternative order, a real substitute for the existing order, albeit artificial: in this way myth negated concrete historical existence and tried to eliminate whatever exists” (Ohana 2009a: 75). Sorel’s work fleshes out the importance of myth, as well as distinguishing forms of violence as they relate to authority. The role of an elite plays a comparatively minor place in his works, but implications for leadership arise both from his views on myth as well as his political leanings in life. His political loyalties often focused upon groups that strongly promoted the role of a leadership group, be it with “integral nationalism”, the group Action Française, or later with the Bolsheviks. His own theories give some clarity for his tendency: to propagate a myth and inspire a revolution, one needs mythmakers. While the myth of the “general strike” might envision a spontaneous unification and movement among the workers, the practical means of attaining such an end would include organization: Sorel’s initial allegiance to syndicalism provided an organizational manner to address this problem, but he increasingly drifted toward groups that focused on a leadership group that would act as the spearhead of the revolution, the proto-vanguard groups of his time.

The elite theorists focused on mass irrationality, the social need for elites, and the manner in which these elites operated. But another manner of engaging with perceived mass incapacity arose during this period, which in practice often took on the legitimating function described by Mosca. We now turn to the rise of science in mass political discourse, and its tendency toward scientism.

## Scientism as Moral Language

As a means of adding legitimacy to the vanguard organization as the sole interpreter of History’s dynamics and the “tasks” of the epistemologically-privileged population, scientism as a mode of language became a constitutive part of vanguardist ideology. Such language was already implicit in vanguardist thinking – based upon the “objective” view of History inherited from Hegel and Marx – but gained additional strength with the popularization of scientific modes of language in the period of vanguardism’s prehistory. Broadly, we could label the latter part of the nineteenth century, and moving well into the twentieth century, the “Scientistic Era”. To use Voegelin’s description, scientism involves:

- (1) the assumption that the mathematized science of natural phenomena is a model science to which all other sciences ought to conform; (2) that all realms of being are accessible to the methods of the sciences of phenomena; and (3) that all reality which is not accessible to sciences of phenomena is either irrelevant or, in the more radical form of the dogma, illusionary.

*(Voegelin 1948: 462; see also Hughes 2012)*

With advances in the physical sciences, as well as the progress of engineering in shaping the world through technology, the popularity of “scientific” theories of humanity and society increased. As Weikart summarizes this idea among certain Darwinists,

every feature of the cosmos – including the human mind, society, and morality – could be explained by natural cause and effect. Everything was thus subject to the ineluctable laws of nature. As a corollary to this, science became the arbiter of all truth.

(Weikart 2004: 13)

Many different ideologies sought connections with Darwinism, be it nationalist, racist, or even Marxist.<sup>7</sup> Whether in the sociological/economic theories of Herbert Spencer (Palmeri 2016: 107–118), or particularly in the biological/evolutionary language of Darwinism, political language increasingly took on a scientific tone. The popularized versions of scientific theories could provide both a level of legitimacy and clarity that ideologies (vanguard or otherwise) may have lacked: “The advantage of the Darwinian Kampf ums Dasein was that it was not only concrete but also comprehensible within the relatively simple theoretical schema of evolution” (Kelly 1981: 138).

As science (and scientism) gained a greater hold of public attention, ideologies increasingly shifted to a rhetoric and logic of “science”, both in works of theory as well as in propaganda. It is through this scientific understanding that many of these ideologies attempted to differentiate themselves from earlier “utopian” systems, while also attempting to attach their own ideologies to the advances of science in that period. Marx provides a good example of this change; as Sperber notes, in the period after the 1850s, Marx’s writings move in a direction “in which he both accepted and criticized new scientific advances. He accommodated his philosophical presuppositions to them, but also held fast to his philosophical basics, *while articulating them in a form more acceptable to a positivist era*” [emphasis added] (Sperber 2013: 392). The move to scientific language did present challenges to many ideologies, which would continue within vanguardist systems. Marxism again provides a useful instance, be it in the controversies regarding the early “humanist” Marx versus the later “positivist” Marx, the differences between Marx and the more explicitly positivistic Engels, and among later schools of thought within the Marxist tradition.

It should be noted that scientism’s influence was not limited to vanguardist ideology; while scientism aids in the creation of a vanguard party notion of political organization, it also resulted in the development of more technocratic or expertise-based ideas of organization, such as in the focus on social engineering (for instance, see Olson 2016). In practice, the line between vanguardism and technocracy can blur, with the eugenics movement providing an excellent example of this overlap, with some adherents moving in the direction of a vanguard

of race (the Nazi party being the prime example) while other adherents focused more on rule by experts (see Leonard 2016). The idea of some type of scientific racial “improvement” had multiple supporters, including the noted physician Johann Peter Frank, who straddles the positions of pre-vanguardists as well as modern technocrats in his notions of “medical policing” (Eigen 2006). Madison Grant – a notable figure in the conservation movement as well as a major advocate of racial restrictionism – similarly falls into the scientific realm that can encompass elements of vanguardism as well as technocracy (see Spiro 2009).<sup>8</sup>

For vanguardist movements and organizations in development, scientism provided the logic (and rhetorical means) for distinguishing category-based ideologies from purely interest-focused groups. Rather than merely advocating for the interests of a particular class or national/ethnic population, scientific language provided a level of legitimacy for category-based epistemology; the defense of these groups was not merely a preference for the particular, but instead played a role in a larger, holistic, and (often) deterministic dynamic of society where the particular population played a monumental role. In this sense, scientism provided at least the appearance of a more rigorous and empirical basis for vanguardist notions, lending them a validity they might otherwise lack.

From this mixture of influences and factors, vanguardism was a possible answer to social and political circumstances. However, had general stability reigned, vanguardist ideologies would likely have remained marginalized in comparison to other groups, filling a role not unlike the anarchists. Two calamities – one an ideological crisis of confidence, the other a world-shattering conflict – provide the environment for vanguardist organizations to move from organizing and theorizing to political action.

## The “Crisis of Marxism” and the First World War

We now turn to two major events: specifically, the “crisis of Marxism” which created some of the spaces for revisionism (Leninism, Sorel’s views, Mussolini’s arguments, etc.), and the central importance of the First World War in creating a milieu for vanguardist groups to operate and succeed.

We will begin with the “crisis of Marxism”. This “crisis” is important for two major reasons. First, the dissonance within the Marxist tradition itself opened up space for thinkers – whether they were to remain Marxist, would become “revisionists”, or something else – to bring in ideas from outside sources. Indeed, “[a]lmost every serious revolutionary in the twentieth century has had to settle his accounts with the Marxism of the nineteenth century” (Gregor 2009: 75). While many would turn to Kantian forms of moral reasoning, various others would turn to the elite theorists, the racial theorists, or additional views. Second, this dispute provided intellectual room to advance what a “party” was to be in a mass society, and how a party fits into the wider stream of History. The “crisis of Marxism” denotes a period from around 1897 to the beginning of the First

World War (see Levine 1984: 28–45; Gregor 2012) when many European writers, activists, and intellectuals began facing serious faults within Marxism. These faults came in three main varieties. The first fault involved the notable failure of some Marxist predictions, specifically concerning the increased impoverishment of the working class, the increased antagonisms between capital and labor, and the movement toward the final class revolution leading to socialism. The second fault centered on theoretical lacunae within Marxism, especially in some of the differences between Marx and Engels, as well as differences within Marx himself over time. We can separate this problem into two broad issues: the conflict between revolutionary versus evolutionary Marxism, and the conflicts between determinism versus voluntarism. The third major fault, which intertwined both theory and practice, was the role of the Party in the movement. Indeed, the issues already broached in many ways come to their culmination in the issue of the place of the Party: there was general agreement that the Party was important, and that it appeared to have a central importance for Marx. But what its role should be, how the Party is involved in the broader movement of the proletariat and History, and what Marx himself thought of these matters in any given work, remained highly contested. It was in attempting to find solutions to these problems that many of the most notable vanguardist movements would arise, and these debates would influence, directly or indirectly, the general disputes within and among vanguardists well into the future.

The first, and perhaps the most dangerously delegitimizing, crisis for Marxism was its sheer failure in its predictions. Both in its earlier formulations as well as in its scientific reframing, Marxist ideology emphasized its strictly “scientific”, non-utopian nature; rather than presenting an aspirational model of how the world *should* be, the theories of Marxism instead illustrated what *will* be, regardless of subjective or moral preference. While serving as a strong legitimating belief for Marxism’s “objectivity”, failures of prediction could cut to the heart of the ideology’s legitimacy. At points, defenses of Marx’s failed predictions reflect the *post hoc* unfalsifiability of Marxism; as Marx wrote voluminously over multiple decades, much of which was in conflict with itself, his texts provided numerous avenues for the more dedicated followers to find “explanations” for these flaws. More rigorous solutions to these problems arose from the Marxian notion of History. Specifically, some argued that Marxism could not be held at fault for the failed predictions of Marx, as Marx’s historical position (as recognized within his own theories) prevented him from seeing later developments. Other solutions focused on extensions from Marx’s broader theories, explicated in various theories of “imperialism” and “late-stage” or “finance” capitalism as creating somewhat different dynamics in class relations. The varying types of solutions, however, opened doors to significantly different models for how a proper movement should proceed, or indeed whether Marxism (rather than some type of “revisionist” theory, like syndicalism) should remain at the forefront. It was the reigning “orthodox” interpretation of Marxism, represented by the German Social Democratic Party

(headed by Karl Kautsky) and more broadly in the Second International, that suffered the most from these prediction problems, insofar as its own ideology had striking lacunae:

For all the analytic machinery invoked, and the persuasive language employed, the relationship between the economic base and the psychology of participants in the historic process are nowhere specified with testable precision. The plausibility of the assertion that the anticipated, or actual, breakdown of the economic system would compel entire classes to act in a *specific* manner is less than self-evident. [emphasis in original]

(Gregor 2009: 113–114)

In the end, the Second International could not find adequate means to remedy these flaws, providing opportunities for numerous other Marxist (and later, non-Marxist) ideologies and organizations to thrive.

The second flaw, and the key crisis for the theoretical underpinnings of vanguardist organizations, circled around the debates of revolutionary versus evolutionary Marxism, or in many ways, the dispute between voluntarism and determinism. Once again, Marx's capacious writings seemed mired in contradictions, at points sounding purely deterministic, at other times emphasizing the role of voluntary acts to move History, and still in other works noting some mix of the two. While such difficulties are also notable in Hegel's works, the problem is more severe in Marxism, as it looks to and desires the radical change of the world. Whether or not changes are determinate or depend on voluntary acts, therefore, makes a significant difference in the political and social organization of Marx-inspired groups. An additional complication was the role of Engels – were he and Marx of the same mind, or did Engels view reality differently than Marx, and thus interpret Marx incorrectly (for instance, see Levine 1984: 22–27)? An adequate starting point for the “crisis of Marxism” could begin with the disputes between Karl Kautsky (as head of the German Social Democratic Party) and Eduard Bernstein's “revisionism”, although one could see it as the first “bubbling up” up of discontents and controversies that were spreading. Some of the most notable disputants in this debate included Kautsky, V. I. Lenin (extolling revolutionary action), Bernstein (emphasizing the evolutionary mode), and Benito Mussolini (serving as editor of the main Italian Marxist journal, *Avanti!*, he pointed toward the importance of nation in class conflict, as well as pointing toward revolutionary action of “proletarian nations” against “plutocratic nations”). In the end, the debates surrounding this determinism/voluntarism flaw resulted in the general demise of the Second International “orthodoxy”, replaced with more modern notions of “social democracy” deriving from Bernstein, revolutionary class-based vanguardism with Lenin and the Bolsheviks, and revolutionary nation-based vanguardism with Mussolini and the Italian Fascists.



The third major flaw, and the key crisis for the organizational development of vanguardism, was the role, structure, and activities of the Party. Earlier in this chapter, on the discussion of Marx's contributions to vanguardism, a significant omission was his development of the role of parties. Such omission was intentional, insofar as some of Marx's words helped "spur" the discussion of parties later on, but he himself provided little guidance; indeed, the idea of "party" that would develop during the late nineteenth to early twentieth century would not have existed in Marx's own time. From *The Communist Manifesto* and some other writings, Marx appeared to consider the Party of the proletariat to be quite important. But here again, we find the difficulties of squaring the role of an active party with a theory of material determinism. In a strong sense, the issue of Party overlaps strongly with the second flaw of evolutionary versus revolutionary Marxism; while the German Social Democrats perceived itself (to varying levels) as both integrating the working class into political society while also preparing for revolutionary – indeed, millennialist – change, the Second International "orthodoxy" was incapable of appearing adequate to either task. Once again, the end product of this issue was the "purifying" of the Party, either as an integrating tool (in the more evolutionary "social democracy" parties) or as an explicitly society-changing organization (in the revolutionary vanguard parties). Even with this broad crisis of confidence within Marxism, vanguardism may only have gained importance as one sect among many, and one with little influence. With the onset of the First World War, however, theoretical questions on organization quickly became practical questions of action and revolution.

If the previous decades presented the first images of mass society in politics, then the First World War showed plainly the horrors of mass society in war. The war, among other things, brought to a breaking point the crisis of Marxism. Marxian theorists and groups believed that, in such a conflict, the proletariat of the various nations would see their cross-national affinities and turn on their "bourgeois masters": in practice, the proletariat proved fully willing to kill other members of the proletariat instead of rebelling against their countries' bourgeoisie. Perhaps more importantly, the number of socialist parties (and the Second International generally) that sided with their national governments undercut their legitimacy strongly as international "representatives" of the working class, leading to significant intraparty splits where the established party hierarchies clashed with smaller, more radical groups that viewed themselves as holding the more "pure" position of the Zimmerwald conference (see Nation 2009). Additionally, some revisionist Marxists – Mussolini being the primary example – turned fully toward the nation as the primary category-based population rather than that of class. The acrimony, and level of existential consequence, of these internal disputes were made all the more harsh by the utter ferocity of the First World War, with its new technologies and tactics. The high death toll, the jarring nature of total warfare, the shocking effects of chemical weapons, and the apparent inability of political leaders to assess – and end – the conflict created immeasurable costs to societies at economic, political, and (for lack of a better term) spiritual/existential levels.

The sheer destructiveness of the war had numerous ramifications, for Marxism generally and vanguardism specifically. First, the war effectively exterminated the last vestiges of the purely reactionary (i.e., not capitalistic) regimes within Europe; where Marxism could previously see the totality of the negative present as being caused by capitalism as well as reactionary regimes (particularly Tsarist Russia), now the negative totality by necessity became monocausal. In other words, while the period before the war could permit Marxian theorists to explain social developments as a matter of capitalist dynamics as well as the actions of “reactionary” (and historically vestigial) regimes, now only the Enemy category remained as the “defender” of the negative totality of the present. Second, and most obviously, the war resulted in the first instance of a vanguard group coming to power: the Bolsheviks of Russia. Regardless of whether other vanguardist parties viewed the Bolsheviks positively or negatively, the concrete example of a vanguardist party taking power and keeping it would provide significant motivation for other vanguard organizations to make similar attempts; few things can bring as much hope for change as historical precedent. Third, the destabilizing of international and domestic order helped strengthen a variety of vanguardist groups that, in stable conditions, would likely have lacked the environment in which to thrive (see Neaman 1999: 26–32; Ohana 2009b). General instability, war exhaustion, infrastructure (both physical and social) destruction, and internal ideological disputes effectively created a “perfect storm” of conditions in which vanguardist organizations could form, gain political power, and maintain themselves for a significant number of years. From the cauldron of these factors, with the First World War as a breaking point, the “golden age” of vanguardist politics could begin.

## Conclusion

As noted above, the number of influences shaping the development of vanguardism is not minor. However, we have considered some of the most important of these influences to “set the stage” for the following groups. As is evident from the discussion of history, particularly the interactions, overlaps, and divisions among ideologies and thinkers happening within a moderately short period of time, providing a chronological intellectual history of vanguard organizations would be highly convoluted. Instead, we will consider each form of vanguardism independently, noting overlaps and cross-fertilizations as necessary. We begin with one the most successful, as well as deadly, vanguard types of the last 150 years: the vanguard of class.

## Notes

- 1 One can see this mentality illustrated in the words of Paul Barras, a leader of the French Directory, who noted “Your choice is to be terrorized or to become a terrorist” (quoted in Higonnet 1998: 47).

- 2 One could look at the ideology of the “Society of Thirty” (or the “Patriot Party”) as perhaps moving more in the direction of a nationalistic ideology, but again, the general tendency is toward a generic “people” instead. See Wick 1987: 254–273.
- 3 I follow Gregor’s lead, who notes “Hegelianism is an all but impenetrable philosophical system, for which there is no single universally accepted interpretation, much less an acknowledged roster of all its real or fancied social or political implications” (Gregor 2012: 16).
- 4 Arendt’s attempt at a definition also suffers from this problem, insofar as here the distinction between a “bad” mass (“mob”) and “good” mass (“people”) appears to depend more on an after-the-fact interpretation of a movement rather than the aspects of mass populations themselves: “The mob is primarily a group in which the residue of all classes are represented. ... While the people in all great revolutions fight for representation, the mob always will shout for the ‘strong leader,’ the ‘great man.’ For the mob hates society from which it is excluded, as well as Parliament where it is not represented”. (Arendt 1968: 107).
- 5 “The world of politics, indeed the destiny of the nation, lay, he believed, in the hands of the ruling class. The masses counted for nothing more than a source for supplying the ruling class with talented and ambitious individuals. As long as these individuals were effectively assimilated in the ruling class, there was no need to fear political instability and, least of all, revolution” (Bachrach 1980:17).
- 6 On Sorel’s influence on Albert Camus as well as Régis Debray, see Vernon 1978: 61–68; for his influence on Mussolini’s works, see Sternhell 1994; and for his work involving Maurras and his “integral nationalism”, see Jennings 1985: 147–148. For a discussion of Sorel’s views of the Fascists and of Lenin, see Jennings 1985: 159–167.
- 7 On the odd relations and “myth” regarding Darwin and Marx, see Ball 1979.
- 8 It should be noted that the scientific notions of race theory spread between academia and political practice: “Most historians have drawn a deep line of separation between university race scholars and cruder publicists ... . But there were also important areas of overlap, shared attitudes and assumptions. Race research was not an ivory tower pursuit; it was literally, in the eyes of the race hygienists, a matter of life and death” (Field 1977: 528).

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# 4

## VANGUARD OF CLASS

We have the following of the majority of a class, the vanguard of the revolution, the vanguard of the people, which is capable of carrying the masses with it.

– *V.I. Lenin [emphasis in original] (quoted in Harding 2009[1978])*

The vanguard party is associated primarily with the “vanguard of class”, and is especially coupled with the Bolshevik party organization and Marxism-Leninism as an ideology. The activities of Lenin’s faction, its success in the October Revolution of 1917, and the subsequent rise of the Soviet Union as a world power gives this particular form of class-vanguardism pride of place, both conceptually and historically. Given Leninism’s highly important role in vanguardism, and the dominance of Marxism (in various forms) for the class version of vanguard organizations, we will pay particular attention to these groups in this chapter. However, we will also consider in passing other, less successful class-vanguards, often representing the peasant or agrarian class. It is in this transition from purely proletarian-based class-vanguard groups to other classes (especially peasants), and the increasing variability of the term “class”, that connects the history and developments of the class-based vanguard to the later, subaltern-vanguards of the second part of the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup>

Setting the pattern for the other category-specific analyses, this chapter is separated into seven sections. First will be a comparison of the similarities and differences in class-vanguard ideology compared to anarchist views. The second section will examine the population category of class itself. Third, class struggle as History’s dynamic is analyzed. The “science” of dialectical materialism is the focus of the fourth section, while the fifth section explicates the materialist bases of class-vanguardist totalism. The sixth section describes the bourgeoisie as the Enemy population, and the seventh section discusses the vanguard party itself. We

will begin with a distinction between “class” and “people” as it separates class-vanguardists and anarchists.

### **“The Class” versus “The People”: Distinctions from Anarchism**

Before the rise and eventual dominance of Marxist theory, egalitarian class-focused ideologies in Europe that developed during the nineteenth century have a host of theoretical or population foundations, many in conflict with one another. Some versions were more pastoral, such as the emphasis on the *obshchina* among the populist *Narodnaya Volya* movement in Russia (Ulam 1998 [1965]: 88–91), while others shied away from revolutionary change, instead emphasizing gradualism of the style of Robert Owen and others (Owen 2007; see Muravchik 2002: 31–59).<sup>2</sup> But the most notable form, in the context of this work, is the role of anarchism as it relates to class-based notions of ideology. In the second half of the nineteenth century, one could say the main ideologies shaping the forms of radical, class-based organizations were Marxism and Bakunin’s form of anarchism. Indeed, the longstanding and fierce disputes between Marx and Bakunin within the First International – eventually leading to the collapse of that group (Sperber 2013: 502–517) – continued over the decades, with various Marxist and anarchist thinkers/activists defining themselves and their positions in contrast to the other.<sup>3</sup> In itself, such a conflict may appear as no more than a historical curiosity with little in the way of wider ramifications. But the formulation of the population that matters – “the class” versus “the people” – would shape the future form of vanguardism in significant ways.

Although both Marx and Bakunin, as well as a host of other writers and activists, emphasized the importance of the working class, the meaning and importance of the proletariat to these two forms of thought varied significantly. The views of Marx are generally known, and were discussed in the analysis of vanguardist prehistory. For anarchists of the Bakunin persuasion,<sup>4</sup> the proletariat was important as the voice of the oppressed masses; but while the workers may be a highly important voice, and may become a *dominant* voice, it is not the *sole* voice of “the people”. This focus on the undifferentiated “people”, often synonymous with “the oppressed”,<sup>5</sup> indicates how the anarchists perceived the masses in a manner similar to the proto-vanguardism of the Jacobins. Two notable results of anarchism’s maintaining an undifferentiated perspective on the masses distinguish its organizational and theoretical forms from vanguardism itself, even if anarchists in practice might form alliances with vanguardist groups or perform radical and violent acts. The first distinction is the emphasis on action by the masses, “which arises spontaneously within the people and destroys everything that opposes the broad flow of popular life” (Bakunin 1990 [1873]: 133). Rather than a concrete instance of a broader, abstract historical dynamic (as in the case of “spontaneous” actions by workers in various Marxist systems), the anarchists viewed spontaneous action by the masses as the dynamic itself.<sup>6</sup> Organizationally, the emphasis



on the central role of masses' "instincts" limited the amount of "guidance" an anarchist group could claim over "the people". The second, and theoretical, difference is Bakunin's focus on "life" over "thought" in this movement (Bakunin 1990 [1873]: 132–138; also see Kropotkin 1970: 110–113).<sup>7</sup> Spontaneity in organization reflects the "natural" and non-rationalized nature of mass action and mass emancipation in this view. As the proper form of social organization arises from within the mass itself rather than from outside dynamics or actors, so too does the motivation and reasoning on this movement arise from life rather than from theoretical and abstract philosophical systems. Similarly, just as no organization can "guide" the masses to freedom, no overarching theoretical system can "guide" the masses either.

For vanguardists like Lenin, Marxists who placed too much emphasis on the "spontaneity" of the masses showed themselves as falling into petty-bourgeois and anarchist delusions (see Lenin 1970 [1920]: 363–370). Although the anarchists and class-vanguards (particularly Marxist versions) shared a loathing of the bourgeoisie and a goal of capitalism's extermination, anarchism's undifferentiated view of the revolutionary subject created a significant break between itself and class-vanguards. Both anarchists and class-vanguards viewed themselves as responsible for setting the "spark" that would create the wildfire of social revolution, but anarchists did not perceive themselves as "guides" (especially "scientific" guides) in a manner that becomes central for class-vanguardist theory and practice. We now turn to the qualities of the central mass population of this chapter, the class.

### ***Category: Class***

The epistemologically-privileged category within this system is that of class; in practice, pride of place in this conception going to the working class (or proletariat). While other economic classes have also formed vanguardist groups of a type – one possible example being the Union of Maximalists (SR–Maximalists), an offshoot of the Socialist Revolutionaries of Russia (operating in the same era as the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks) who give priority to the peasant class (see Kowalski 1997: 222; Radkey 1953) – most of these organizations tend to be subsumed under and/or exterminated by proletariat-focused organizations. Also in practice, other classes, especially the peasant class, could be viewed as allies or additional "revolutionary subjects" (even if in an ancillary role) to that of the proletariat.

Although the specific details vary, there are consistencies in the class-vanguard's exultation of a particular economic class. Often based upon Marxist (or Marxist-inspired but revisionist) methodology, the epistemologically-privileged class contains two unique relational qualities vis-à-vis the rest of society. First, the class holds a fundamental relationship to society's continued development and/or survival as an economic matter, wherein the class is truly indispensable for society's functionality. In effect, the class is the central productive "base" upon which the

economy of the society rests. Second, this class is structurally and systematically oppressed (“alienated” in Marx’s earlier works), with the class being particularly repressed by the powers that be, who are often broadly classified as the “owners” (be it of capital, land, corporations, or other economic instruments). It is this second point that tends to be the most important. In contrast to moralist arguments (that emphasized structural oppression as being inherently unjust), most vanguardist groups eschew moral argumentation as unscientific and/or utopian. Instead, the vanguardist-style organizations and ideologies point to this oppression as making the epistemologically-privileged economic class a “universal” class (in a Hegelian sense); not only is the class oppressed, but its oppression is both greater and more unique than in times past. The “purity” of this oppression – oppression in its unmitigated form – creates a truly “universal” class, as it intimately experiences (and thus epistemologically can understand) the historical dynamics of society, with its universal position also pointing the way to ending class struggle. It is this structural oppression of the economy’s “productive base” class that gives the class its epistemological clarity and its world-historic mission.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the class’s indispensability creates the necessary conditions for an “overcoming” of the current system to a new, better, and advanced society (usually some form of socialism or communism).

Even though the epistemologically-privileged category is linked by economic class, class-vanguards note the difficulties this class faces from vestigial connections and relations which inhibit the mass population’s ability to gain consciousness and commit to action. These vestigial connections include family, tribe, religion, nation, and (to an extent) language. The economic class may have numbers, energy, and mission on its side, but the lack of organization that spawns from these vestigial divisions remains a key stumbling block for it. Especially in cases where there is an alliance between the advanced class and a more backward class – the usual example being joint activities by the proletariat and the peasantry – lack of organization by the advanced class dooms it to less radical change; in Trotsky’s words, such alliances can be successful “only under the revolutionary hegemony of the proletariat” (Trotsky 2010 [1930]: 285–286). Even within the class, there are important distinctions. First is the “mass” of the class itself; this population provides the energy and movement necessary for social revolution. The mass is limited, however, to “spontaneous” activities and limited aims; in other words, the mass lacks the necessary consciousness to be fully actualized by itself.

Unlike Marx, Lenin was troubled by the instability and impermanence (“spontaneity”) of the labor movement, and he therefore established an authority (the Party) to ground the movement and tie the proletariat back to its founding principles. While Marx denied the need for foundations, Lenin sought to preserve the work of the “founder” (Marx) by creating an “authoritarian” party.

*(Mayer 1992: 400)*

Second are “class traitors”: individuals who – for reasons of false consciousness or self-enrichment/“bribery” – aid the dominating class structure in persecuting the epistemologically-privileged class. In Leninist terminology, these individuals can be classified as “labor aristocracy”, “*lumpenproletariat*”, or “petty-bourgeoisie”. Third is the “advanced wing” of the epistemologically-privileged class, who have attained class consciousness. Moreover, this “advanced wing” is the foundation for the organization that will provide the class its directionality; providing education and agitation to the mass to raise its consciousness, seeking social alliances with other classes (as needed), and analyzing the contemporary “correlation of forces” to assess the right times for actions against the state, the advanced wing and its organization becomes the catalyst for the class’s historically determined actions in changing society. This role for the advanced wing is already implicit in some of Marx’s works: “Nevertheless, Marx’s and Engels’ assumption that they and the other Marxian Communists, as leaders of the proletariat, made up the avant-garde had already appeared clearly in the Communist Manifesto, even though the word ‘avant-garde’ does not occur in it” (Egbert 1967: 353). What should not be forgotten, however, is the central importance of the mass of the class; even if it requires direction from the “advanced wing”, the mass itself is the true power in the category, without which the “advanced wing” is nothing.

As noted in describing vanguardism generally, the central category often remains underdefined, regardless of the specific group. For proletarian-focused groups, this was especially problematic insofar as “Marx never defined what he meant by class” (Elster 1985: 319). In the case of class-vanguardism, one major influence on this under-definition is likely the backgrounds of many vanguardist leaders (theoretical and/or practical): Marx (Sperber 2013: 18–25; Berlin 1963: 23–28) and Lenin (until his father’s death; see Service 2000: 25–26, 35, 48–49) were middle-class bourgeois in origin, while Trotsky was the son of a self-made prosperous farmer (Service 2009: 12–19). Although both were born out of wedlock, Fidel Castro’s father was a self-made landowner (Coltman 2003: 3–5) and the Shining Path’s Abimael Guzmán lived in an upper-class home before heading to college (Franco 2013: 134). Mao came from a comparatively *nouveau riche* peasant family (Chang and Halliday 2007: 1–9; Meisner 2007: 1–3), while Stalin’s origins as the son of a failed cobbler could be placed in the loathed *lumpenproletariat* (Service 2004: 16–17; Montefiore 2003: 26–27). Among the main theorists and leaders of class-vanguard groups, actual members of the proletariat class are notably small in number. Another issue involved the characteristics of class, which itself created a host of difficulties. These problems included determining whether one was a class member if employed in a certain field or if a certain level of consciousness was required, an issue that would become more acute with Maoist interpretations and later among subaltern groups. Moreover, the proper categorization of those who have changed classes presents theoretical quandaries: is a “declassed” member of the bourgeoisie ever fully “proletarianized” (Jefferson 1969: 255)? Is a former “rich peasant” (*kulak*) fully “proletarianized” after collectivization, or

does s/he retain “reactionary” views? What of children raised in bourgeois homes who end up in the working class by adulthood? One could sum up these issues as denoting the blurry line between the “objective” and “subjective” factors that make up class membership. Within the theories of class-vanguards, these practical, yet central, issues of categorization are at best ambiguously addressed; it is in practice where they achieve a “solution”, described below in the “Enemy” category.

A second reason for the ambiguity in class is the relation of vanguard theory to vanguard success. Class-vanguard victories have only occurred in societies where the urban proletariat was quite underdeveloped, and the economy still remained overwhelmingly rural and peasant in station, which seems to go directly against the prescriptions of Marx-inspired class-vanguard analysis. Although a significant type of response was to emphasize the importance of the working-class in historical dynamics rather than in numbers (in a sense, quality over quantity) and note the tactical and strategic importance with other classes, two primary means have been used to circumvent this difficulty. The first is to change the level of analysis: in the cases of Lenin (Lenin 1987a [1917]; also see Harding 1996: 119–141; Le Blanc 1993: 251–255) and Trotsky (2010 [1919]), the class-vanguard theories are still operative if one looks at the level of the global economy rather than the national economy, focused on imperialism as a historical stage (Lenin)<sup>9</sup> or on the “law of uneven development” (Trotsky) (see also Stalin 1927 [2002]: 274–276). For vanguardists attempting to retain fealty to a broadly Marxist paradigm, these types of modifications are preferred. Another means that is used is to modify the definition of class itself. Here, Mao Tse-Tung is of central importance (Knight 2010: 173–175, 178–181). In combining “oppression” and “mentality” to categorize the epistemologically-privileged class, “Mao Tse-Tung Thought” becomes the launching-pad for subaltern-vanguards who sought to use the general Marxian theoretical infrastructure while abandoning the substantive role of the working class (Mao 2007a [1937]; Mao 2007b [1937]; Mao 2007 [1957]; see also Mao 1972: 237–250). A merging of these two means is notable in the works of Antonio Negri, where “class” is defined in a manner similar to the “subaltern” model, but still placed within a generally Marxian argument focused on the means of production. This leads to the nearly Manichaeic dichotomy of the “oppressed” and “oppressor”, one of the most notable distinctions between a purely class-based focus rather than a “subaltern”-focus.<sup>10</sup>

Although I have thus far focused on Marxian, proletariat-focused class-vanguards, it is certainly possible for other forms of class-vanguardism to arise, privileging the peasantry, the capitalists, the “new class” of technical experts, or others. Indeed, even Leninism (and, more broadly, Marxism) argues that the bourgeoisie held a world-historic role in the past, although not on the same level as that of the proletariat. However, the general historical pattern has been for the working class, or some other economic group considered to be the “oppressed” that is in some sense “proletariatized”, to be the singular focus of class-vanguard parties. Other classes among the “oppressed”, such as the peasantry, may serve important

functions for the proletariat and its “advanced wing”, but such groups themselves lack the knowledge and singular role of the proletariat.<sup>11</sup> This is of particular interest, as some forms of “proletariatizing” lead to shifts from one form of category to another; the discussion of Italy as a “proletarian nation” in Fascism<sup>12</sup> and the changes in the role of the “oppressed” within the Lenin- and Mao-inspired New Left shows how an initial class-vanguardism can transform into something substantively different, but structurally similar. *Narodnaya Volya* in Russia, for instance, held the peasantry as the central class. Predating the Bolsheviks, and best known for their assassination of Tsar Alexander II, they also emphasized the role of an “elite” of the toiling masses bringing about revolution; but unlike Lenin (who may have found some inspiration from the group: see Pipes 1990: 342–348), their main focus was on uniting the Russian peasants under the banner of freedom and of land.<sup>13</sup>

The class itself is important as the epistemologically-privileged category, the one that can see the true dynamics of History. But what is this dynamic? Here we turn to the next area of central importance for the class: not only does it provide the epistemologically-privileged with knowledge, but that class itself is the driving force in the resolution of the historical dynamic itself.

### ***History: Class Conflict***

For the vanguard of class, it is the conflict between classes that drives History toward its final culmination. In the words of a later vanguard group, “Class warfare is a confrontation in which the existence of one party depends on the death of the other” (Cellules Communistes Combattantes 1992 [1985]: 173). Class conflict is both the dynamic of History as well as that which will terminate “History”: with the final victory of the epistemologically-privileged class and the creation of a “classless society”, the historical dynamic (and with it, oppression) ceases. The importance of class conflict cannot be overstated, even after a vanguard party gains power:

Under capitalism the proletariat was an oppressed class, a class which had been deprived of the means of production, the only class which stood directly and completely opposed to the bourgeoisie, and therefore the only one capable of being revolutionary to the very end. Having overthrown the bourgeoisie and conquered political power, the proletariat has become the *ruling* class; it wields state power, it exercises control over the means of production already socialised; it guides the wavering and intermediary elements and classes; it crushes the increasingly stubborn resistance of the exploiters. All these are *specific* tasks of the class struggle, tasks which the proletariat formerly did not and could not have set itself.

(*Lenin* 1970 [1919]: 295–296. For earlier examples, see *Lenin* 1970b [1918]: 687–688; *Lenin* 1970 [1917] Also see *Tyler* 1963: 42)

As class conflict is the motor of History, the mass of the central class – albeit spontaneous in its actions and mired in questionable consciousness – is necessary for History to reach its end.

Where “orthodox” or “traditional” Marxism and Leninism split ways concerns the activation of the proletariat:

The essence of the Leninist revision and the other revisions is to convert the historical determinism of Marx’s theory of societal stages into historical indeterminism governed by the political choice of a revolutionary vanguard. Revolution still requires favorable social conditions, but revolution itself is no longer viewed as inevitable but rather as the result of planned activities by a revolutionary vanguard.

*(Malecki 1973: 955)*

This distinction should not be made too strict, as various “orthodox” forms of Marxism also vehemently denied a strictly determinist/gradualist theory of History, such as that presented by Eduard Bernstein. The main difference is the scientific knowledge of the active (or “subjective”) agents and what level of legitimacy, if any, this knowledge provides the agents in guiding, or ordering, the epistemologically-privileged class.

How this dynamic works is simple in theory but complicated in practice. Theoretically, the contradictions amid the productive systems in the economy and the social relations of labor reach a point where class conflict becomes inevitable between the “progressive” class and the “reactionary” class. Most vanguard theories also draw from Marxism the notion of increased immiseration of the working class and the intensifying of class antagonisms as other classes (vestiges of earlier economic relations, such as those found in feudalism) become part of one or the other of the dominant classes. At some point, revolt by the working class erupts, issuing forth a social revolution that will overcome the contradictions in society, leading to a highly productive, non-alienated, socialized economy. In practice – the realm in which vanguard parties have the most interest – the dynamic of History is much more complicated and contextualized. The failure of many of Marx’s predictions to materialize and questions regarding what level of legal engagement/parliamentary compromises are acceptable for a Marxist working class party, along with numerous other issues, made the dynamics of class conflict harder to analyze and to act upon. After multiple Social Democratic parties aligned with their own countries at the beginning of the First World War, additional questions of internationalism versus national action became paramount as it related to the “inevitable” victory of the proletariat.

The determinism of the class conflict view of History shapes class-vanguards in two major ways. First, the “end” of History provides a cornerstone for the legitimacy of the organization. It is this “dialectical” view of History that distinguishes “utopian” versions of socialism/radicalism – based, it is argued, upon

too-rosy views of willed communal action and/or parliamentary change – from “scientific” socialism/radicalism. In the latter case, the classless society is not the result of “dreaming” and moralizing, but instead the outcome of “scientific”, at times almost mathematical, analysis of the empirical conditions of the economy, society, and class consciousness. In this regard, class-vanguardists are of one mind with other types of Marxists, in contrast to Owenites, Comtean positivists, followers of Fourier, Saint-Simonians, and anarchists; while Marxists of all schools might find elements of inspiration or “correctness” in any of these other groups, the Marxian-influenced class-vanguards agree that these other groups still contain fundamental, often labeled “bourgeois”, flaws (see Theen 1972: 396).

But there is a second way in which historical determinism of class conflict shapes class-vanguards, in a manner that separates them from other Marxists. An ongoing dispute within Marxist circles concerned the degree of determinism entailed by class conflict: if the dynamics of History create the conditions for the “inevitable” victory of the proletariat and the creation of the classless society, is organized and planned activism necessary? In Gregor’s words, “Everything the party had insisted upon for decades involved a conviction that socialist revolution was ineluctable. Given such convictions, it was not intuitively clear what purpose the party or its leadership might actually serve in such a sequence” (Gregor 2009: 119). If the forces of production create the material circumstances that develop into the contradictory social relationships between the bourgeois class and the working class (the “objective” factors), with these economic and social conditions advancing the degree of class consciousness by the proletariat, finally ripening to revolt and the dictatorship of the proletariat, is there any stage in this process that requires willed (or “subjective”) action rather than the spontaneous response of the population? In the writings of Marx and Engels, the answer is at best ambiguous (but see Rodden 2008: 636–637). In practice, the increased parliamentary activity of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) and its attendant compromises with the government, as well as the quarrel over Eduard Bernstein’s “evolutionary” model of Marxism, brought these issues to the forefront. While other types of Marxists vary between themselves on the levels of determinism versus willed action, class-vanguards unite behind the view that organized, willed activity is a necessary part of the historical process.

There are many reasons given for this need, but two are of particular importance. The first reason given is the problem of the working class itself, as its level of consciousness (or “education”) is immature and underdeveloped. Other class-focused thinkers, such as Rosa Luxemburg (Weitz 1994: 33–44), argued that the role of organization was to “educate” the proletarian masses via propaganda and similar activities, but class-vanguardists argue that simple “education” is not enough. As explicated by Lenin, the working class could not, on its own, overcome a “trade unionist” (or “reformist”) consciousness – the result of “spontaneous” proletarian action – unless guided by an avant-garde party, itself populated by a dedicated group of professional revolutionaries:

the masses will never learn to conduct political struggle until we help *to train* leaders for this struggle, both from among the enlightened workers and from among the intellectuals. Such leaders can acquire training *solely* by systematically evaluating *all* the everyday aspects of our political life, *all attempts* at protest and struggle on the part of the various classes and on various grounds [emphasis in original].

(*Lenin 1969 [1902]: 157–158. See also Service 1985: 89–93; Harding 2009 [1977]: 183–189; Meyer 1957: 38–55*)<sup>14</sup>

While the tactics used by this party to influence the working class masses may vary (*Lenin 1970a [1905]a*), it is the willed activity of the organized party that serves to move the “spontaneous” actions and beliefs of the proletariat to a truly “conscious” level, both before the revolution and afterward (*Lenin 1970 [1922]: 688–671*):

For Lenin, the very subject and object of history, the very beneficiary of eons of historical development – the proletariat, must be treated as the tool of history and the instrument of the Party. Leninism is predicated upon the belief that action requires consciousness and that if the “right” agents will not take necessary action, they must be manipulated – by force.

(*Pearce 1991: 109*)

As the working class operates in a bourgeois-saturated society – via its laws, norms, and cultural artifacts – the proletariat suffers under a mental “hegemony” (in Gramscian language) which only the party, guided by declassed individuals and “advanced” workers, can break.<sup>15</sup>

The second main reason for willed, organized action regards the actual development from developing movement to successful social revolution, and the pragmatic need for leadership. In overtaking bourgeois society, class-vanguardists argue that the activated, conscious working class is a necessary but not sufficient condition for victory. That the proletariat would “rise up” and, through some miracle, succeed both in overthrowing the current state and establishing the proletarian dictatorship, appeared mystical rather than scientific. Specifically, the working class – as a mass movement – would need direction, insofar as some directive agency would be needed to determine when the time was “ripe” or “unripe” for attack, to decide what types of slogans and alliances would be helpful or harmful for success, and to establish safeguards to thwart the inevitable counter-revolutionary reactions that would occur either domestically or internationally. As a mass body, the working class (or indeed any mass population) lacks the means to achieve these actions “spontaneously”; instead, a pre-existing, guiding party is necessary to help the epistemologically-privileged class to seize the moment as it comes and avoid losing the high ground after victory. Coordination would be key in successful revolutionary activity, and coordination requires organization.



As the class – and the class alone – has the ability to see class struggle as the basis of social interaction and development, the rationality of this class must be significantly different from that of the dominant society. “Bourgeois” sociology and “capitalist” economics, blind to the role of class struggle, can only lead to incorrect assessments based on fallacious notions of “eternal” or “natural” laws. To understand History, therefore, the class develops a different science, that of dialectics.

### ***Science: Historical Materialism, Dialectical Materialism***

While the types of “science” used by class-based vanguards can vary, we will focus most of our attention to the proletariat vanguards based on Marxist and Leninist logic. Many other systems in effect borrow heavily from these two schools of thought (under the broad heading of “dialectics”), or are so ideologically underdeveloped that there is little systematic methodology at all. As noted in Chapter 3, the dialectical method (as used by vanguardists) has its origins in the works of Hegel, as restructured by Marx and Engels. While nation- and race-vanguards pull from the *Lebensphilosophie* interpretations of Hegel, and the later subaltern-vanguards emphasize the master/slave dialectic (often examined through the lens of Marx’s earlier writings, not discovered until the early 1930s), class-vanguards instead view dialectics in the manner explicated by the later Marx and Engels (including in *Das Kapital*), as well as in contrast to more positivistic views (usually associated with the Second International and Karl Kautsky; see Bronner 1982) or gradualistic interpretations (from Eduard Bernstein).

Within Marx-inspired class-vanguard ideologies, the main “science” is dialectics, often referred to as “historical materialism” or “dialectical materialism” (as will be discussed further below). “Materialism” in the science of class-vanguardism is comparatively straightforward, insofar as it denotes the centrality of material processes on societal development. Difficulties arise in denoting how “deep” this materialism goes, particularly in its implications for the (lack of) autonomy of social relations or concepts in the “superstructure”. There is general agreement that materiality (versus idealism) is a central part of the ideology, with numerous variations on what this means specifically. Defining “dialectics”, on the other hand, is an ongoing challenge within class-vanguardism. The simplified versions of dialectics – such as the “thesis-antithesis-synthesis” model or the notion of “inherent contradictions” in reality (Mao 2007a [1937]) – do not provide much guidance for “science”, although these models gain more influence in the practical discourse of class-vanguardist regimes as they ossify. The ambiguity is increased insofar as dialectics can sometimes be viewed as a “science”, while other times is explained as a method that, while the cornerstone for class-based analysis, is not synonymous with the “science” of historical materialism. In the case of Marx-inspired class-vanguards, dialectics became a challenge, first because of the ambiguity in Marx as well as the variations from Engels, and later from the discovery

and publication of Marx's early "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844". In a source available to both early vanguardists as well as later readers (*Capital*), Marx briefly describes dialectic as entailing:

in its comprehension an affirmative recognition of the existing state of things, at the same time also, the recognition of the negation of that state, of its inevitable breaking up; because it regards every historically developed social form as a fluid movement, and therefore takes into account its transient nature not less than its momentary existence; because it lets nothing impose upon it, and is in its essence critical and revolutionary.

(Marx 1887 [1978]: 302)

While providing a general notion of what dialectic entails, and its emphasis on ontological Becoming, it is less than detailed, both in itself as well as in distinguishing it from the purely Hegelian form of dialectic.

If one were to summarize the class-based view of dialectics, one could note various traits of the "science"/method. First, social reality falls within the realm of Becoming rather than Being (leaving to the side the issue of whether physical reality itself also operates in this manner). The second element (deriving from the first) is that social relations must be viewed historically rather than absolutely; no social relations, or the systems built upon them, are permanent or eternal, but instead are contingent and changing. Third, the foundation of social relations is to be found in economic structures and relations, most especially in the historical period's "means of production", with the means of production creating the social "modes of production".<sup>16</sup> Fourth, contradictions exist within social relations vis-à-vis the economic structure, leading to alienation and oppression of one class by another. Fifth, the process of antagonism within this class struggle creates revolutionary potential to move into the next stage of social relations, a form of "overcoming" (*Aufhebung*) that is neither the pure victory of one side over another nor a "splitting of differences" and compromises between the two, but rather the creation of a new structure that integrates the previous contradiction into a higher, unified whole. Finally, the current conditions of class struggle, based upon the extraordinary advancements in economic and technological power, will be the final struggle, with *Aufhebung* in this case leading to a non-alienated, truly "human" collective society. Or, in Marx's words, with the developments created within the bourgeois era that will lead to the victory of the proletariat, "This social formation brings, therefore, the prehistory of human society to a close" (Marx 1978 [1859]: 5). Although Marxists of various stripes – vanguardist and non-vanguardist – would emphasize one part or another more strongly, most would agree that this basic skeleton covers the main points of concern. As is obvious, the "science"/"method" of dialectics and the dynamics of History overlap significantly, with each in some ways driving and explaining the other.

Although for most intents and purposes, such a distinction is hair-splitting, we should pause to explicate the difference between “historical materialism” and “dialectical materialism”. On a philosophical level, historical materialism focuses on the dialectical relationships between man and nature, society and productive forces, and classes within society. It is a “human” (or “social”) science as it concerns itself with the natural world only inasmuch as it interacts with, and to an extent is “constructed” by, the human world. Dialectical materialism, on the other hand, often expands into the realms of nature, arguing that dialectics is not merely a human or social dynamic but is in actuality the structuring process of material reality itself, “reflected” in the human mind (Lenin 2002 [c.1908]: 357). Especially among Western Marxists, historical materialism is the “pure” method of Marx, analytically robust and practically useful, while dialectical materialism is the sad result of Engels’ positivistic turn of mind and primitive expansion of Engels’ perspective by various Marxists (Jay 1984: 7–14).<sup>17</sup> For supporters of dialectical materialism (of which class-vanguard groups predominate), “historical materialism” is more reflective of a petty bourgeois idealism that tries to separate the human and natural (and thus undercuts the actual meaning of materialism itself).<sup>18</sup> Once a class-vanguard organization gains power, the emphasis on dialectical materialism can have wide repercussions (see the case of Lysenko as discussed in Birstein 2001: 45–51), but the difference of historical materialism and dialectical materialism during the movement stage of the organizations seems less strategically important (although similar disputes can arise, such as that among the Bolsheviks regarding empirio-criticism). A practical difference, at least historically, appears to be that historical materialism is preferred by Western Marxists who voice revolution, but are rarely active in trying to bring it about, while the followers of dialectical materialism tend to be much more militant in action. One could say that historical materialism keeps its “purity” but lacks concrete relevance, while dialectical materialism is more “crude” but also much more politically effective.

Understanding the twists and turns of this logic can be daunting, especially given the sundry tactical maneuvers of Lenin and other class-vanguards. For some authors, this reflects the at best instrumental nature of class-vanguardists’ use of theory for the purposes of gaining power.<sup>19</sup> But one of the central strengths of class-vanguardist dialectics is its flexibility; in relation to changes in the “correlation of forces” in society and/or economics, the party can shift to new tactics and mid-range strategies to bring about its final goal of revolution. When various class-vanguard thinkers accuse others of thinking “mechanistically”<sup>20</sup> (for an example, see Koestler 2001 [1949]: 34–36), they indicate the lack of flexibility from too-rigorous forms of theorizing which prevent the actual move to *praxis* and liberation. While focused on Stalin, van Ree’s description is applicable to most class-vanguards:

although Stalin was flexible to the point of being unprincipled when it came to tactics, in his broader goals and perspectives he was inflexible.

In the first aspect, he was indeed a pragmatic, even a cynic, but in the second he was a fanatic and a true believer.

(van Ree 2002: 9)

The dialectical “science” permits this mixture of flexibility and rigidity, as the key social group/class, the final aims sought, the centrality of the party that guides the group to its end, and the general mode of thinking used would remain sacrosanct, while all other theories and actions were contingent and malleable dependent upon circumstances.

The role of the class-vanguard organization in this science is moderately clear-cut, since for class-vanguards and

[f]or Lenin, the truly proletarian (i.e., scientific) consciousness is elaborated independently of the actual proletariat, and the political organization which possess that consciousness is entitled to regard itself as embodying the “will of history”, whatever the empirical working class thinks of the matter.

(Femia 1983: 355)

The “science” provides the broad blueprint for action that guides the advanced wing of the epistemologically-privileged category in its pursuits for the class. This illustrates the distinctions between the “science” advocated by class-vanguardists and the “science” of other class-focused, but not class-vanguard, groups:

The “orthodox Marxists” interpreted Marx in the spirit of positivistic scientism, emphasizing its *objective* side – objective knowledge, “objective factors,” objective laws of social development. Lenin set against this the spirit of “party-ness” (*partiinost*) in science and much greater reliance on “subjective factors,” such as militant class consciousness, activism, discipline, and organization. [emphasis in original]

(Walicki 1990: 296)

In other words, “science” does not simply exist for the sake of observation and knowledge, but takes on a specifically action-oriented, and organizationally oriented, twist in class-vanguard systems.

### ***Totalism: Social Existence Founded on Economics/Materialism***

For most class-vanguard groups, the all-encompassing nature of the economic system (or “material base”) over the structuring of social relations necessitates that the dynamics of History drive all aspects of life. As these connections are objective (the means of production itself) as well as subjective (the self-awareness and consciousness of a class as an exploited entity), there is no element of life that escapes these dynamics.<sup>21</sup> The dynamics of History are not limited, therefore, to

the “purely” economic, as all life is in a real sense “economic” in this view. Every part of social life is thus interconnected, but not equally. The actions of the epistemologically-privileged class have an overwhelming impact on all other parts of social life, as do the reactionary actions of the Enemy class, while the dying classes generally only have weight insofar as they interact with the broader dynamic of bourgeois/proletarian struggle.<sup>22</sup> In this way, the totality is similar to Hegel’s model of interactions in History, where world-historic societies have pride of place in a certain period of time, while societies that have passed their period of importance or various “history-less” people are dragged along by dynamics they cannot control.<sup>23</sup>

Moving from the belief that all social existence, in some sense, has at its foundations the contemporary means of production (and, importantly, the relations of ownership in the “modes of production”), class-vanguards can claim a universal understanding of society’s dynamics in the past and present, with some broad understanding of the future. Small acts or events can reveal “tendencies” that have large ramifications; more to the point, these tendencies are not limited to any specific sphere of life, but can influence (or represent the movements of) the dynamics of History. Class-vanguards put particular emphasis upon the material bases for this totalism, so as to avoid being “idealist” (i.e., creating “just-so” stories from concepts rather than assessing material realities). As Lenin wrote in his *Philosophical Notebooks*,

The totality of all sides of the phenomenon, of actuality and their (mutual) relation – that is what truth is composed of. Relations (= transitions = contradictions) of notions = the main concept of logic, *and moreover* these notions (and their relations, transitions, contradictions) are shown as reflections of the objective world. The dialectic of things creates the dialectic of ideas, and not the reverse. [emphasis in original]

(quoted in Anderson 1995: 72)

In this view, a “phenomenon” involves the mutual interaction and interrelationships between all parts. The extension of this idea is that phenomena are also similarly interrelated in their actuality. It is in this overarching interconnectedness that totalism has its place.

What distinguishes the class-based view is its specifically materialist focus; although the dialectical science/method originates in the idealist system of Hegel, the class-based perspective begins from the notion that material interactions that create the ideational connections. The specific quality of the epistemologically-privileged population in effect determines the foundation of totality; as it is the economic class that sees the truth, and gains this ability because of its place in the dynamic of class conflict and economic development, it is the material realm (as identified with production) that is the source and origin of these various connections. In a sense, vanguardist totality is merely an extension of the logic that holds together the epistemologically-privileged category, the dynamic of History, and

the science of this dynamic. But totality itself also serves as an explanation for the previous three elements; while the logical extension of these three brings a notion of totality, the idea of interrelational totality also provides grounds for the overwhelming importance of the world-historic class to changes in all other aspects of social existence, for instance. Totality also serves the function of explicating the role of the Enemy category in the conflict for a new world.

As with all vanguard groups, translating the “insights” of History is not merely done in order to foment political revolution and seize power, but to advance the vital social revolution in all aspects of society. Whether looking at the case of the Bolsheviks (see Lenin 1987b [1917]), the Maoists (Hyden 1967/1968: 26; Schwartz 1960: 606–607), or others, the interrelation of all aspects of society in the ongoing class struggle presented numerous areas for theorizing, as well as for strategic and tactical planning. Totalism is not limited only to the importance and possibility of complete social revolution by the epistemologically-privileged class; the paradisiac classless society after the social revolution is counterpoised to the chthonic society of the present. The dominance of the present by the Enemy class creates a totality of exploitation, irrationality, and alienation, and the sheer oppressive nature of contemporary society reflects the totalistic character of social reality. The Enemy – a dying and archaic class – can only maintain itself through its totalistic control of society’s material bases and normative regulations. It is to this Enemy that we now turn.

### ***Enemy: Bourgeoisie/Capitalists***

Almost universally, class-vanguards perceive as the key Enemy category the bourgeoisie (and capitalism in general). Being the owners and/or main beneficiaries of oppressive capital, the bourgeoisie as a class maintain the historically obsolete and repressive forms of social relations encapsulated in capitalism. As such, they remain the key obstacle both to the working class and to History, although they are also fulfilling their historical function. Having formed the wage relations of capitalism, the structures of the modern state, and the cultural norms within society, the bourgeoisie is an all-encompassing, omnipresent plague that must be overthrown. The bourgeoisie is irredeemably against History, as its economic/social position can lead it nowhere else. The bourgeoisie as a class is also blind: lacking epistemological access to the true dynamics of History, they “mistake” contingent historical constellations of relations and rationality for “natural laws”, be it economic views (such as the law of supply and demand) or social (including the nature of the family). It is notable that there are no actions that this Enemy category can commit which do not, in some manner or another, reflect self-interest, brutality, and greed; even those who are acting out of sentimental “good faith” are still objectively assisting oppression.<sup>24</sup>

As with the epistemologically-privileged class, the class-vanguard definition of the bourgeois is quite malleable. One cause of this pliable definition

is historical. While Marx placed class conflict as the central dynamic of History, he lived in a time where “feudal” factors could still be taken into account, the best example being Marx’s near-paranoia at times regarding the activities of the Russian Tsar spearheading “reaction” in Europe (see Anderson 2010: 43–50). Such “holdovers” from earlier times – the dying classes – provided analytical room for enemies/factors other than simply the bourgeoisie, whether they were comparatively minor or past their prime. But as such “reactionary” forces disappeared, and as the proletarian revolution failed to materialize, Marxian-inspired thinkers/actors of various types had to theorize that an ever-stronger (and yet simultaneously “crisis-ridden”) capitalism saturated all aspects of life. While earlier, the Enemy was primarily the bourgeoisie with possibly the aid of feudalistic forces, now only the bourgeois class remained; as such, its definition became increasingly flexible. However, the main cause for this under-definition is the same as that noted above in classifying the proletariat: “class” itself remains an ambiguous term, and class members often act in ways contradicting class-vanguard theory (proletarians supporting the bourgeoisie, or various bourgeoisie serving as leaders of the class-vanguard itself). This Enemy category is expansive, inasmuch as it can also include any groups/individuals who are “objectively” assisting the capitalists in class conflict. A notable difference between this Enemy category and the epistemologically-privileged category is that, while the latter tends to contract in who it includes over time, the former tends to expand; as noted above, a worker could become (“objectively” or otherwise) a “petty-bourgeois” or *lumpenproletariat*, but it would be nearly impossible for one with the wrong class background to become a proletarian. Whether internal splits within or among organizations (as seen in the case of the “fighting communist organizations”: see “Excerpts from Notes ...” 1992 [1990], Pluchinsky 1992: 42–45) or the more violent purges witnessed in the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China, even previously praised members of the vanguard organization itself were not immune from their Enemy class origins.

This universal fixation upon the bourgeois class is worth examining, beyond what was noted at the end of Chapter 2. For most of the other forms of vanguard organizations discussed in this work, the Enemy category is dependent on the particular ideology of each group; for instance, the Enemy in race-vanguard groups is inevitably another race, but which one depends on if the epistemologically-privileged race is “Aryan”, or “Sun People”, or another. For class-vanguard organizations, however, this is not the case; whether one is dealing with traditional proletariat-focused groups, peasant class groups, or others, the hatred of the bourgeoisie is constant. Just as interesting is that this hated class seems to be the only one that does not tend to form vanguard organizations to further its interests. While this may reflect some technocratic rather than vanguardist tendency in capitalist views (see Silva 2008; Kanigel 2005: 486–490), or indicate the use of other organizational forms (perhaps such as militias), it is still notable. Even those

pro-capitalist ideologies that might incline toward a vanguardist perspective have yet to develop such an organization.<sup>25</sup>

The dehumanization of members of the Enemy category is rampant within class-vanguardism. In the case of Leninist Russia,

Groups and individuals perceived to be hostile were continually referred to in biological-hygienic terms, whether vermin (*parazity*, *vrediteli*), pollution (*zasorenost'*), or filth (*griaz'*), and were subjected to ongoing purification. Yet the implications of this biological-hygienic rhetoric were not static.

(Weiner 1999: 1121)(see also Lenin 1970a [1918])

Classes that previously held power might be labeled *byvshie lyudi* ("people of the past" or "former people"; Fitzpatrick 1999: 116–117; Stites 1989: 131–135), while those providing assistance referred to as the "imperialist running dogs" (in the Chinese case), and even those within the working class itself could become Enemies. A typical example is the "labor aristocracy"; while associated with Lenin's explanation of imperialism, theoretically any "class traitors" can serve as an Enemy, but at a lower level than the capitalist class. Such a "class traitor", referred to as "bribed" by the bourgeoisie, lacks class consciousness, but more importantly actively undermines the movement of the class; as such, he is an "objective" Enemy (obstructing the victory of the proletariat and aiding the capitalists) even if not doing such actions intentionally (and therefore not a "subjective" Enemy). Those who lack the correct understanding of the "science" of the class are "subjective" Enemies – usually referred to as revisionists. In certain circumstances, a "subjective" Enemy may not be an "objective" one, but this terminology would instead apply to other classes that may serve as allies (the peasants being a primary example of a class subjectively against the proletariat but, in certain situations, an objective ally). In practice, an "objective" traitor is usually presented as also a "subjective" enemy, as seen in the purge trials of the Soviet Union and the Cultural Revolution of China, but also (on a lower level of violence) in the disputes between the Red Brigades and the Red Army Faction. The bourgeoisie and capitalists are, of course, both "objective" and "subjective" Enemies; by their position in social relations, their actions, their blindness, and their beliefs, they are intractable enemies of the epistemologically-privileged category.

Compared to the epistemologically-privileged class, the Enemy is weak opponent. Capable of seeing the dynamics of History, and its own central place in the conclusion of class struggle, the Enemy class is ill-equipped to defend itself, much less gain total victory. Why, then, does the world-historic class not take its place at the forefront of revolution? How does the dying bourgeoisie continue to maintain its dominance against the progressive and vital class? Knowledge, strength, and the force of History are all necessary conditions for the epistemologically-privileged class's ascension, but they are not sufficient. A directive agent is needed, one that can determine when and how the class is to fight its battles against the



Enemy, calculate the best possible alliances in any given circumstances, and ascertain when the truly revolutionary “moment” has arrived. As a mass population, the class cannot do these activities on its own; it is only with the vanguard party that all conditions for revolution come into existence.

### ***Vanguard Party: Democratic Centralism***

The “advanced workers” and “professional revolutionaries” of class, organized together, presents the “ideal type” (in Weberian terminology) of the vanguard party. Class-vanguardism was the first to develop a vanguard party as we know it, and moreover created a form of vanguardism that showed a remarkable ability to survive, especially compared to vanguard groups based upon different epistemologically-privileged mass populations. The class-vanguard party creates the organizational foundation for action at the initial movement stages, as well as providing the institutional basis for the governing bodies that would arise upon seizing power (the new party-state).

One cannot understate the utter importance of Lenin – both in his writings and as an example – in making class-vanguardism both “respectable” and tempting, not only to other class-based thinkers, but to other vanguardist groups as well. As Samuel Huntington expresses it in his *Political Order*,

In terms of the political theory of Marxism, however, this is quite inappropriate – Lenin was not a disciple of Marx, rather Marx was a precursor of Lenin. Lenin made Marxism into a political theory and in the process stood Marx on his head. The key to Marx is the social class; the key to Lenin is the political party.

*(quoted in Malecki 1973: 955)*

Even if one were to say that Marx was the better thinker, Lenin by far was the superior actor on the political, and world, stage. His understanding of the vanguard party as being both directive as well as flexible in different circumstances (see Lenin 1970b [1905]) provided the necessary leadership for an organization that could be both rigid in ideology and fluid in tactics, with the constant guide that the party “would be a pitiable cipher in every sense, were it to refuse to seize power when an opportunity occurs for it to do so” (Lenin 1997 [1917]: 8). His unique ability to link an epistemologically-privileged mass population (theorized by Marx) to an organization that had the capacity to mobilize support and gain political power (such organizations as had already been seen with the Jacobins and others), marks the political innovation of vanguardism as inconceivable without Lenin:

Lenin struck a different balance between imagination and strategy: the phantasm of the enlightened and organized vanguard served to transfigure

his own pursuit of power and thus to justify – to himself and others – the twists and turns of his strategy.

(Arnason 1993: 68)

In particular, by emphasizing, organizationally and theoretically, “the absence of a community of reason” among those not in the world-historic mass population (Niemeyer 1964: 490), Lenin created a “universal” party that could simultaneously base itself on rigid exclusiveness.

Returning to the class-vanguardists, revolution and change without the organized “advanced wing” of the proletariat is effectively an impossibility, as there exists “the indissoluble union of tactics and organisation” (Lukács 1971: 336). A central part of the class-vanguard organization is the insistence (in theory, though often not in practice) that the “advanced wing” is not superior to the class (Gouldner 1974: 30; but also see Conquest 2008: 6).<sup>26</sup> To both combat the Enemy as well as to prevent revisionism or domination (instead of direction) of the working class, discipline is a central part of the class-vanguard party organization. Although the “advanced wing” of the proletariat was not superior to the class, this did not indicate that the proletariat itself was to hold political power while the transition to the classless society occurred:

At no point in *State and Revolution* or in any of his other writings did Lenin advocate the direct exercise of authority by the workers in the sense of the transfer of control over each productive enterprise to the workers within it, acting independently of the state and exerting their authority through a trade union or factory committee.

(Evans 1987: 10; also see Rosenau and Paehlke 1990: 136)<sup>27</sup>

The vanguard party as “directing” and “educating” the epistemologically-privileged class continues after gaining political power, as the “true” social revolution would take time, both in removing the vestiges of the past within the specific country of political revolution as well as in dealing with the Enemy-dominated, capitalist international arena.

Determining the character of the party is not a simple process. The role of the party (and, in particular, bourgeois-originating intellectuals in the party) was a strong area of contention:

Intellectuals who were genuinely sympathetic and supportive of the workers were as rare as “white crows.” However necessary and useful intellectuals were to the worker movement, it was important to recognize, insisted Bogdanov, that intellectuals brought along with them “cultural baggage” – habits and attitudes – which were different from, and potentially harmful to, proletarian self-development.

(Sochor 1990: 285–286)

For class-vanguard parties, finding the correct means of legitimating the organization, maintaining its vital connection to the epistemologically-privileged class, while also sustaining the avant-garde qualities of the party to achieve revolution, presented an ongoing challenge. The great difficulty in class-vanguardism, as with all others, is keeping the “advanced wing” as a part of the epistemologically-privileged group, rather than lording over it. But the limits on reason within the ideology itself present a strong motivation toward self-superiority on the part of the “vanguard of the vanguard”. The predominant issue was permitting the necessary flexibility of the “advanced cadre” against the more quietist tendencies of the class as a mass population, while simultaneously preventing the domination of the party by “adventurers” or others who would separate the organization from the vital powers of the world-historic class. Once again, it was the Bolsheviks of Russia who created the organizational structure to address this problem.

Through their development, class-vanguard parties have tended to form a specific type of internal governing structure, emphasized by the Bolsheviks and integrated into later class-vanguard groups, whether through direct instruction from the Soviet Union (such as in the “Twenty-One Conditions” set by Comintern: Hallas 1985: 28–43) or inspiration (the FARC as a partial example: Brittain 2010: 42–49, 91–92; see also Leech 2011: 21–24). The general organizational structure is that of “democratic centralism”,<sup>28</sup> although there are numerous variations of this structure, depending on the circumstances involved in the creation of the party and its further development. Usually, the center is some form of party committee that handles major decisions. It is “democratic” insofar as issues from the bottom of the hierarchy are supposed to circulate upward to the top, where:

problems and issues would percolate up from the bottom of the party pyramid. This was a requirement. If anyone in the “grass roots” covered up a problem, he might suffer later for having done so. This was the “democratic” side. As problems percolate up through the successive stages of the party hierarchy, they are increasingly collected and synthesized. When they reach the party apex they are like the product of the upward movement of staff recommendations in any large bureaucracy. However, once the party apex gets those issues and decides party policy on them, there is no longer any substantive debate on the validity of the decision, its wisdom or accuracy. The decision is transmitted back down to the grass roots in the form of absolute, sovereign command. Substantive opposition is the dread “deviationism.” The only debate that is allowed is how best to carry out the decision, not whether it is right. This is the centralism side of democratic centralism.

*(Wheeler 1957: 640)*

This internal structure of the vanguard party sought to “square the circle” of an egalitarian ideology led by an elitist organization. The party-as-mere-part of the

epistemologically-privileged class maintains its responsiveness to the mass population, learning from and listening to the problems and concerns of the population of which the party is merely a small part, while the party-as-directive-agent preserves its autonomy in managing the revolutionary movement and in assessing the population's contingent desires under the "science" of the class's true interests.<sup>29</sup>

In practice, "democratic centralism" tends to lead toward a consolidation of power with the leader of the central committee.<sup>30</sup> How far this power can be exerted depends on the leader in question, as well as the historical circumstances of the development of the party and the general movement. The power of the leader is less institutional than it is reputational and organizational. Lenin's reputation and position made him a dominant player in the Bolshevik party and later in Soviet Russia, and Mao's role as a military leader as well as the focus on his "Mao Zedong Thought" provided him additional power. But another main factor is organizational. Stalin's consolidation of power would be hard to envision without his ability as member of the Party's "Political Bureau" (Politburo) as well as Organization Bureau (Orgburo), among others, to place loyal subordinates in key roles (but see Service 2004: 173–174), and Mao's ability to set various members of the Chinese Communist Party against one another served to cement his nearly deified position within China (Gao 2007: 125–130; MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2006). Guzman – the General Secretary of the *Partido Comunista del Perú-Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path) – specifically looked to the organizational actions of Mao in his own efforts, as part of the organization's move to link Maoist and more Latin American radical thought and action (Taylor 2006: 19–22). Although the higher echelons of the Party could perhaps curb or even stymie the efforts of the leader – as seen in some of the disputes between Bukharin and Lenin, among others (Ulam 1998 [1965]: 162–165) – particularly powerful leaders could circumvent these cadres or, in more extreme cases, exterminate them as revisionists who were "aiding" (objectively or subjectively) the Enemy class.

This leader fixation, however, does not eliminate the importance of the central committee; indeed, the central committee is, in effect, what separates the longevity of class-vanguard organizations from most other vanguard types. Even in those cases of a particularly strong and overwhelming leader, the central committee provides the means for succession of power and authority. Thus, even after such all-powerful (and destructive) leaders as Stalin and Mao, the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China were able to continue in no small measure to the institutional continuity provided by the central committee organizational structure. This tendency is notable, as other types of vanguard organizations – especially nation-vanguards – will make the practice of democratic centralism's leadership fixation into their central theory of organization. Although the "principle of one-man authority (*yedinolichie*)" (Azrael 1966: 43) becomes more prominent explicitly in administration and implicitly in the party itself, it is rare to see *yedinolichie* explicitly predominate a party in its movement phase (the Shining Path perhaps being a notable exception).

## Conclusion

Among forms of vanguardism, those based on class hold a pride of place against the others for five reasons. First, class-vanguardism (especially in its Leninist form) has the clearest genealogy to one of the main ideational influences on vanguardism's development through its devotion to Marxism. Second, class-vanguard parties were the first to achieve success in gaining political power, with the victory of the Bolsheviks in Russia being viewed as a world-historic event on the level of the French Revolution. Similarly, the third reason is based on the general spread of class-vanguardism, gaining power in multiple states (including ranging from major countries such as China to more minor states, including Ethiopia during Derg control). A fourth reason, related to the leadership structure discussed above, is the comparative longevity of class-vanguard governments, especially in comparison to other forms of vanguard governance. Finally, class-vanguardism remains an inspiration and a resource for later vanguardist forms; as will be discussed in Chapter 7, the various vanguards of "the oppressed" (or "subalterns") generally use a derivative form of class-vanguardist epistemology and organization. As such, even when denying the "meta-histories" or other aspects of class-vanguardism, these groups still have their basis – and most of their strength – from what they pull in from their class predecessors.

But class-vanguardism was far from alone in developing in the early twentieth century. Only five years after the success of Lenin's vanguard party in the October Revolution, a different form of vanguardism – under the direction of Mussolini – would gain power through its March on Rome. We now turn to this alternate, and far less successful, form of vanguardism: the vanguard of the nation.

## Notes

- 1 The vanguard of class is closely connected – historically and conceptually – to the vanguard of the "oppressed", or of the "subaltern". As the categorization of "class" became more flexible in Marxist-inspired circles, reflecting various historical developments, other "savior" mass populations (or "revolutionary subjects") were sought while still using a derivative form of Marxian discourse as its basis. These connections are discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.
- 2 Many of these types of movements could also have strong nationalistic overtones. This trend would continue; for instance, Fidel Castro's initial views appear much more nationalistic than Marxist, especially regarding "the people" (Castro 2008[1953]:25–27). It is only later that his thought and actions took an explicitly Marxist-Leninist slant.
- 3 From the anarchist perspective, see Bakunin 1990 [1873]: 176–189; Kropotkin 1970 [1887]: 50–52. For a general overview of this dispute, see Franks 2012.
- 4 This is not to deny or ignore the plethora of anarchist forms, both in the past and in the present (Marshall 2010). In the development of vanguardism, however, the type described by Bakunin and his followers has greater historical relevance. For a reconsideration of anarchism's past, see Kinna and Prichard 2009: 271–276.
- 5 This mixture arises again among subaltern vanguards. While some of this change may indeed derive from subaltern thinkers/activists specifically using anarchist theories, the immediate origins were the ever-expanding and diluting of Marxist categories.

- 6 “In the belief that *the masses bear all the elements of their future organizational norms in their own more or less historically evolved instincts*, in their everyday needs and their conscious and unconscious desires, we seek that ideal within the people themselves” [emphasis added] (Bakunin 1990 [1873]: 135).
- 7 “Life” over “thought” is also emphasized in some vanguard types, including nation-vanguards and race-vanguards. The undifferentiated notion of the masses that drives this “life” distinguishes the anarchist form from the vanguardist forms; while anarchists focus on “life”, the vanguards focus on *specific* life, be it the Aryan race or the specific nation, often deriving elements from *Lebensphilosophie*.
- 8 There are overlaps in this concept of productivity among some nation-based vanguardists’ focus on the “productive” classes of the nation (denoting the “good, patriotic” bourgeoisie and workers) against the “parasitic” portions (“plutocrats” and “Bolsheviks”).
- 9 This perspective also influenced Lenin’s views once in power: see Lenin 1970c [1918].
- 10 In one sense, his argument is familiar: his focus on the “productive” parts of society echoes back to syndicalist arguments of the early twentieth century, and the role of the “oppressed” productive elements shares notable similarities with syndicalist (and later Italian Fascist) theorist Sergio Panunzio. See Gregor 2005: 67–80; Roberts 1979: 316–319.
- 11 Lenin did not, however, trust the peasantry as a whole to follow through on the transition from the democratic, antifeudal stage of the revolution through the transition to socialism. Like Marx, Lenin saw the redistribution of land in the democratic antifeudal revolution as helping to develop capitalism and hastening the disintegration of the peasantry itself ... partly because capitalism disintegrates the peasantry and welds together the proletariat .... He saw the working peasant (peasant worker?) as a ‘comrade and equal’ to the socialist worker, ‘faithful ally’, ‘blood brother.’ Other peasants, i.e., those who only exploit the labor of others, were fraudulent profiteers, allies of the capitalist class. [in-text citations removed]  
(Harding 1982: 102)
- 12 The German Communist Workers Party (KAPD) sometimes used similar phrases (Harman 2003 [1982]: 192).
- 13 For a good overview, see Belfer 1978.
- 14 For a contrasting view, see Lih 2008 [2005]: 593–601.
- 15 This view remains consistent among class-vanguards even in the period after the Second World War, when many class-vanguard groups began to shift toward “subaltern”-vanguard ideologies (confer the discussion in Chapter 7 below). Describing European “fighting communist organizations” in Europe in the latter part of the twentieth century, Pluchinsky writes:  
  
They believe the will and strength of the proletariat has been sapped by the extensive (at the economic, political and social levels) domination and repression of the capitalist, imperialist state. They see the development of the ‘consumer-oriented society’ as a capitalist-injected narcotic to suppress the revolutionary zeal of the proletariat. ... Someone must rouse the proletariat from this bourgeois-induced hypnosis and point out the ‘contradictions’ of the capitalist, imperialist state.  
(Pluchinsky 1992: 21)
- 16 For an explication of this idea, see Cohen 2000: 79–87.
- 17 Western Marxists usually include class-vanguardist groups that have gained power as being under the baleful influence of dialectical materialism.

- 18 Louis Althusser's move of theory into a form of practice – an action similar to that of the Frankfurt School, with the differences being Althusser's continued dedication to "pure" Marxism as well as his greater influence on New Left and subaltern groups – is one way in which earlier class-vanguard dialectics were integrated into later subaltern-vanguardist modes of thinking. See Althusser 2005 [1965]: 163–218.
- 19 One need not fully agree with his view to see some truth in Page's remark that, "Those who study Lenin are aware of the fact that simple logic could never sway him from a theoretical position, however irrational, as long as he had politically practicable motives for holding to such a position." (Page 1954: 237).
- 20 This accusation of mechanistic, or "gradualistic", thinking can also be turned against vanguard party members themselves, as Bukharin would discover (Cohen 1980: 115–122).
- 21 There is nothing in society that is not man-made and man-dependent, so anything natural (regular, repetitive, law-abiding) discovered there by a social science would be a fair target for the revolutionary dialectic, which would soon re-absorb its usurped Being back into the eternal Becoming of man's activity. That re-absorption is called de-alienation, meaning the replacement of reified institutions (such as money, the market, or political representation) by consciously controlled instruments. Indeed, on this theory, all social things and arrangements are, or should be, simply our instruments. That is why they can all be revolutionized at one blow.  
*(McInnes 1971: 149)*
- 22 Instances where the state itself could have interests separate from the contending classes is also a possible eventuality, but in itself is also merely a reaction to the struggle of the epistemologically-privileged class (Carver 2004; Trotsky 2004 [1937]: 206–210).
- 23 "Historyless" people also arise as an issue in class-vanguardism, arising from statements by Engels regarding various Slavic groups (Gregor 2009: 171–174).
- 24 The contradictory, yet unquestioned, elements in discussing class-based assumptions come through at times unintentionally, as noted in the case of Werner Sombart (originally focused on class, but moved in a nationalist direction during the Weimar period), who "portrayed a brutal and unrestrained American capitalism inhibiting socialist political growth through the maintenance of high living standard" (Markowitz 1974: 108; Sombart 1937: 79–103). In other words, American capitalism survives as a result of "brutally" keeping living standards *high*, which sounds similar to arguing that a man has proven his salaciousness by rigorously abiding to his vow of celibacy. This is nuanced somewhat in other class-focus thinkers, as in Lenin's explanation that these forms of bribery for the "labor aristocracy" are founded upon the oppression inherent in imperialism and colonialism (Lenin 1987a [1917]: 215–236; see also Polan 1984: 163–171; Smith 1955: 560).
- 25 An Objectivist vanguardist organization seems at best unlikely (for some inkling of Objectivist epistemology, see Rand 1990: 31–37). As much of Objectivist ideology is based upon the notion of individual activity, decentralized authority, and market forces, rather than "party spirit" and coordinated collectivist action, vanguardist organization would be highly unattractive. The idea of the epistemologically-privileged class spontaneously yet correctly committing to a strategy on an individual basis ("going Galt") is explicable in Objectivism, but highly unlikely at best for other pro-capitalist ideologies.
- 26 There are differences on this score even within Leninism itself, especially when considering later interpreters:

Leninism, the justification of rule by an elite or a central committee, is only possible when human beings are denied the capacity to act, the ability to make or create their history, and are instead regarded as an inert or recalcitrant mass, there to

be molded and manipulated by a class of master technicians or engineers. Indeed, Althusser's seemingly benign insistence on the 'autonomy' of theory is but one more sophisticated way of justifying the dominance of the Marxist intelligentsia claiming to speak for or in the true interests of the proletariat.

(Smith 1985: 653)

Leninism, and vanguardism in general, often has this type of dual nature of democracy and elitism.

- 27 In Leninism, creative agency is the prerogative of the Party. The Party is the revolutionary vanguard acting on behalf of an ignorant proletariat. Only Party and the State are truly revolutionary because only they have a clear grasp of the scientific theory of history (Marxism-Leninism). In Leninism, the proletariat is the instrument of the struggle, rather than the agent or goal of transformation. Whatever forms of social organization it evolves that do not correspond with received Party doctrine can be ruthlessly overturned and replaced.

(Pearce 1991: 109)

- 28 For an example of a recent scholar attempting to cleanse democratic centralism of its negative connotations, see Angle 2005.
- 29 This remains the case for the vanguard party itself, but not for other class-specific, though usually non-vanguardist, organizations (such as trade unions or social democratic parties); these groups may be subverted until the vanguard party can overtake them. For an example of vanguard infiltration into non-vanguard groups – in this case, that of Maoist groups infiltrating other Left organizations in the Philippines – see Magno and Gregor 1986.
- 30 Even when the leader was not emphasized, the party itself often took a deified form:

The party could not possibly be wrong. The class consciousness which Lukacs extolled was by no means an empirically ascertainable orientation of concrete workers. It was the 'objective consciousness' that was imputed to the proletariat and incarnated in the Communist party.

(Coser 1972: 198)

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# 5

## VANGUARD OF NATION

For me, revolution is not an attack of St.Vitus' dance or an unexpected fit of epilepsy. It must have force, aims, and above all, method. ... It was necessary then to shake up the masses, because they had fallen into a state of weakness and insensibility.

– Benito Mussolini (1923[1919]a: 97)

Within the late nineteenth through the twentieth century, the two main driving identifications for parties and organizations were class, on the one hand, and nation, on the other. A major similarity between the two was their fixation on egalitarianism; for the former, equality of economic actors (based on solidarity among the working class), while for the latter, equality of nationals<sup>1</sup> (based on solidarity through national lineage/linkage). While some scholars have emphasized the imperative of expansionism within nation-based forms of political extremism (see Kallis 2003), the argument here is that the view of a nation as an epistemologically-privileged population plays the central role. Unlike the class-vanguard, however, nation-vanguards faced greater competition for the leading role of nation-focused groups, leading to (successful) nation-vanguard parties being comparatively rare.

### The Importance of Organization: Vanguards versus Militias

Before delving into the details regarding nation-vanguards, it is necessary to distinguish nation-vanguards from nationalistic militias. Although there is a great deal of overlap in personnel and ideology between these two types of groups, they are different in important ways. Moreover, nationalistic militias and related forms of nationalistic organization (such as coups directed by the state's military) are far more prevalent than nation-vanguard movements;

the number of pure nation-vanguard movements is comparatively small (at least within the West), while militia-style organizations frequently arise. Clarifying the differences between nation-vanguards and nationalistic militias is important to ensure the groups under examination truly fit in the framework of vanguardism itself.

The first, and central, difference combines ideology and organization. Vanguards of nation are explicitly vanguard *parties*; while they inevitably will maintain armed wings in the organization, their structure and self-perception are of a party seeking mass mobilization of the epistemologically-privileged category to further the social revolution generally and to gain political power specifically. Nationalist groups based on a militia or military organizational structure, such as the German *Freikorps* or the Michigan Militia in the United States, usually maintain a different self-image. Rather than seeking to spearhead a social revolution, militia groups usually view themselves as undertaking rearguard actions to protect the nation (however defined) from subversive elements, be it a corrupt and tyrannical government, social revolutionary groups (usually class-vanguards), or other types of “infiltration”; militias, in effect, are explicitly attempting to *preserve*. It would be a mistake, however, to distinguish vanguards from militias as purely one of revolution versus reaction. Some militias can be purely “reactionary” in the sense of attempting to preserve *in toto* the societal order from a certain time. However, most militias are self-aware enough that they aim to preserve portions of societal order, while being completely willing to jettison other elements that are viewed as “foreign” interventions or not “authentically” part of the national tradition (see George and Wilcox 1996: 266–269). Some of this “pruning” can be quite radical, which can lead to overlaps and alliances with vanguardist organizations; however, militia organizations are not devotees of social revolution toward something new but instead dedicated to the purification of what already exists. While the nation-vanguard seeks to change contemporary society radically, the nationalist militia desires to preserve (some) elements of national identity while removing “deviations”.

The second main difference derives from the first: because of their different aims, the interaction with the general population differs significantly between these two types of groups. For example, both use propaganda and agitational literature (emphasizing the greatness of the nation, the threat to its integrity, and other typical rhetoric), but not for the same reasons or in the same manner. The nation-vanguard engages in these acts to mobilize the mass population of the epistemologically-privileged category, aiming specifically to activate the population to fulfill its historical mission. In other words, the vanguard of nation seeks *active* engagement by the population (strictly guided by the “advanced” party). Nationalist militias, on the other hand, have different aims, particularly those “resisting” against the government and/or significant portions of the population. As they do not perceive themselves as advancing a social revolution, propaganda is for justification and acceptance,<sup>2</sup> where militias use this literature to identify their aims and reasons for action, while at the same time attempting to encourage the population to

accept these explanations. Nationalist militias desire the *passive* support (or at least acquiescence) of the population, but do not intend to activate the mass population in a broader fashion. Viewing themselves as “soldiers” at “war”, the desire for mass mobilization of “civilians” is counterproductive and inefficient. Civilians may be useful for militia “insurgents” insofar as they would serve as a source for supplies or safe haven into which fighters could “disappear”, but the interest is not in energizing a mass movement (see Martino 2010: 89–93, 270–276).

The final major difference is purely organizational. The vanguard of nation is structured in a party-fashion; hierarchy exists, especially in the armed wings, but its divisions are reflective of its political/social aims: for instance, the intended organizational style of the Minutemen (an American rightist group most active in the 1960s), based on separate “squads” with little knowledge of each other (see George and Wilcox 1996: 223–225), has strong similarities to “cell” structures used by Leninist-inspired subaltern-vanguard groups. As the name indicates, militias are instead organized in a fashion mimicking military hierarchy. Organizational differences reinforce ideological differences; the vanguard organized as party views itself as revolutionary and mass-based, while the militia organized as a military views itself more as a defensive institution to protect – and yet be separate from – the mass. Obviously, these lines are not clear-cut, and such distinctions can create numerous debates within the organization itself. An excellent example from history comes from the Italian Fascists: originally formed in a militia-like style, the move from Fascist “combat units” (especially the *squadristi*) to Fascist party was highly controversial among the Fascists themselves (De Grand 2000: 142–143). Had the party advocates failed and the Fascists remained a militia primarily, we could not classify them as vanguardists. Most likely, the trajectory of this militia would have diverted significantly – in aims as well as in success – compared to the Italian Fascist party of history. One could look to the Irish example as a comparison: the increased influence of the militia-style Irish Republican Army – against the more proto-vanguardist style of the Irish Republican Brotherhood – led to significant differences in tactics, aims, and self-perceptions (English 2003: 16; Coogan 2000: 12–24).

As a large number of nationalist groups are organized in a militia (rather than vanguard) style, these distinctions are not irrelevant. With these differences in mind, groups that are classified as “militia” organizations rather than “vanguard” organizations include the various German *Freikorps*, the militia organizations in the United States, and the variety of the local secessionist movements within Europe (such as the traditional Irish Republican Army as well as perhaps the Euskadi Ta Askatasuna), among others. Once again, the boundaries between these groups can be porous, both between nation-focused organizations as well as others, perhaps the best-known example being the symbolic move of various *Freikorps* to the Nazi *Sturmabteilung* (SA) in 1933 (Hancock 2008: 137; Waite 1952: 196–197). Two possible causes for the comparatively few instances of nation-vanguards will be considered here. First, as significant overlap occurs between nation-vanguards



and militias, the organizational structure of the latter may be more conducive to success (or at least have the appearance of such), thus siphoning off personnel who would otherwise join the vanguard group. Additionally, for many nation-vanguard groups (exemplified by Italian Fascism), the founding members were often revisionist socialists or other self-identified members of the “Left”. As a result, many nationalistic individuals and groups, usually self-identified as of the “Right”, would be hesitant to join or associate with the vanguard group. In regions where this type of distinction was less clear, one might expect more nation-vanguard organizations to emerge; various nationalist groups in the Middle East may provide an example, although this nationalist development was “delayed” in a sense, generally leading groups that would have been nation-vanguards to be subsumed under the “subaltern-vanguard” model (for the case of Egypt, see Ginat 1997). The second reason is the prominence of the “nation” idea within modernity itself. Unlike some other vanguards, where the self-identification of the group by class or race was comparatively recent, self-identification as part of a “nation” was already well-developed in the West before the rise of vanguardism. As a result, nation-vanguards faced a greater level of competition among the “true” voices of the nation, which could include conservative royalists, religious conservatives, former class elites, and military-oriented classes. This competition limited the growth of nation-vanguardism in its attempt to find its own “niche” among nationalist groups and ideologies, leading to relatively few successful cases, and usually requiring alliances with other nation-oriented groups.

The Falangists of Spain present a useful example of this type of alliance that subsumes the nation-vanguard under a nationalistic military organization (see, among others, Payne 1990; Payne 1978; Preston 1975). While this group was certainly destructive, and shared certain leadership principle elements, there are significant differences that keep it outside the realm of national vanguards, leaving them instead as military dictatorships or some other type of authoritarianism. In these cases, the authoritarian leader in question, such as Franco, saw the instrumental use in pre-existing vanguardist organizations for the purposes of gaining power; the Falangists could be helpful in garnering some mass support. As such, the Falangists themselves would count as a nation-vanguard party in the movement stage. In the process of taking power – and even more so after gaining power – Franco’s ongoing aims to curtail and undermine the Falangist party from obtaining autonomous or extensive power shows the instrumentalist usage (see Payne 1964). Similarly, Imperial Japan – while allied with a nation-vanguard government (Fascist Italy) and race-vanguard government (Nazi Germany) – was not a nation-vanguard as defined in this study. Although the *tennōsei ideorogii* (the imperial ideological system) shared various similarities with certain types of vanguardism, including a leadership principle, as well as a fixation on the Japanese nation – the notion of “nation” and the organizational structure of nationalistic Japan have numerous significant differences from vanguardist systems (in particular, see Gluck 1985; also see Parkes 1997; Lavelle 1994).

Having distinguished these organizational forms, we now turn to the category of the “Nation” itself.

### **Category: Nation**

All nation-vanguards, despite their diversity, share in common the central importance of the nation – however defined – as exemplified through its people in understanding the “true” essence of the nation itself. Moreover, this “essence” provides nationals with the ability to see the cycle of growth and decadence under which nations operate, providing an opportunity to circumvent decay and bring about a rebirth of national greatness. The understanding of “true” reality, in this formulation, comes to those in the nation. What constitutes the nation varies in the context of the organization itself – from a broad form of pan-Slavism or pan-Arabism, on the one hand, to being limited to a specific nation/territory, on the other. The nation may be based within some religious context, may be secularized, or indeed often may stand against religion. The central point is that the nation is a collectivity greater than the sum of its parts; the national population is infused by cultural/linguistic/historical traits that create an ideal whole that is the Nation.

Generally, the nation is not fully separate from “the people”, but neither does “the people” entail the whole of the category “nation”. This category, however, is always a *specific* nation, rather than the ambiguous “people” of Jacobinism (discussed in Chapter 3) or anarchism (noted in Chapter 4): a “people” without an identifier (Italian, Spanish, American, etc.) is no “people” at all, in this view. Moreover, the primacy of national identity, in a “correctly” functioning society, would erase or minimize the other divisions that exist within the country.<sup>3</sup> The epistemologically-privileged nation is a reflection of its social being, with population dialectically entwined with the ideational “material” that shapes it. This dialectic contains two parts. First, the people themselves are shaped by the culture, history, language, mores, as well as institutions of the nation; it is this social existence that separates nationals from others outside of the nation. But second, there is also the affirmation of the national him/herself of nationality, embracing and accepting it as the core of his/her social being, which grants epistemological access to “true” reality. Recognition of one’s self as a communal being – and specifically a communal being shaped by the nation (rather than by class or other traits) – serves a similar function for nation-vanguards as the idea of “class consciousness” in class-vanguardism. By understanding the “truth” of the self as part of the “immortal” nation, the epistemologically-privileged nation also gains access to the dynamics that drive History, and how the specific nation can advance itself to a new stage in human existence. Within this form of vanguardism, however, the epistemologically-privileged nation also becomes aware of the significant dangers that would arise from not acknowledging the dynamics of History: specifically, the awareness of national decadence leading to weakness and servility to other nations.

The essential reality for nation-vanguards need not – indeed, cannot – be the same amongst different nations, even if there are overlaps and similarities; what makes a truly “Italian” response is something that can only be determined inwardly by the “spirit” of the nation and its driving “idea” or “myth”. In practice, the “myth” of the nation can entail apparently contradictory elements, emphasizing both a “progressive” view of modernity and a “conservative” view of customs simultaneously.<sup>4</sup> In the Italian case, the nation-vanguard would merge the radicalism of the Futurists as well as the conservatism of nationalists such as Rocco. For Giovanni Gentile, “Contemporary Italian culture was uniquely positioned between the relatively superficial culture of France, based on positivism and liberalism, and the once deeper culture of Germany, recently grown arrogant and complacent” (Roberts 2006: 185).<sup>5</sup> The variety provided by any given national identity (in its history, culture, and language) creates numerous possibilities for the “idea” of the nation, which also adds to the general diversity of nation-vanguard types.

A notable trait of nation-vanguards – something that distinguishes them from class- and race-vanguards – is their idealist view of the nation category. Focused on culture, national history, language, and similar (often intangible) traits, nation-vanguards usually point to the “idea” (or “myth”) of the nation as the unifying force for the epistemologically-privileged nation, it is the combination of mores, customs, history, and culture that “makes” the nation (and its members) what it is, creating an understanding of historical dynamics within the population. Indeed, “The *squadristi*, like all other Fascists, argued that they were making a ‘spiritual’ rather than a materialist revolution” (Tannenbaum 1969: 1190; see also Sternhell 1987). One key result of this focus is a notion of the epistemologically-privileged population that is both broader and (in some ways) more narrow than that found among class- and race-vanguards. As there is no necessary “material” basis for the nation (be it of economic class or biological race), membership in the nation can cover any individuals who accept the “idea” of the nation as well as illustrating necessary traits (often specifically language skills and cultural knowledge). However, the focus on the “idea” also means that those who do not accept the unifying “myth” of the nation presented by the vanguard party lose their membership in “the nation”, and will likely be considered part of the Enemy population of cosmopolitan “foreigners”. What “idea” or “myth” means in this context requires some explication, and will be discussed in greater detail below.

While the main focus is on the specific, historical nation, its traits are often prefaced as having universal implications. Certainly, the vanguards aim for the strengthening and glory of their own nation, but they will often argue that there is some greater global benefit to national strength and expansion. The nation-vanguard presents the epistemologically-privileged nation as advancing beyond contemporary styles of organization and thought, and thus the rise of this nation to prominence will usher in a new era for humanity. Thus, the benefits of national glory are connected with the purging and renewal of human society in general. The Italian Fascists, for instance, would often point to the examples of the Roman

Empire as well as the period of the Renaissance; while part of this rhetoric was intended to connect the glories of the past to the political organization of the present, it was also meant to show how national advancement brought about new modes of civilization (see Visser 1992). Thus, just as the Renaissance benefited the whole of humanity, its specific glory belongs to the Italians, in this perspective. This benefit, naturally, will come at the cost of the Enemy category of the “cosmopolitan” (likely through its extermination), but, as with the class-vanguard’s view of the capitalists, the destruction of this group should not be a cause for pity, as its annihilation is a necessary condition for the good of the rest.

As with all vanguard types, oppression plays a significant role in formation of the epistemologically-privileged nation, often put into the language of “struggle”. For the nation, this oppression is often a mix of internal and external factors, with both usually connected to decadence in some form. Internally, the epistemologically-privileged nation, in its true strength, has been suppressed by the decadence of ruling elites and cultural decay. This oppression is often two-sided, in that ruling elites are chided for being overly conservative (and thus not adapting to the needed changes of modernity) while also condemning capitalists and others for “denationalizing” themselves and the culture. Externally, the epistemologically-privileged nation is oppressed by the present so-called “great nations” of the world, either directly through their governments or indirectly through their economies. Adopting language similar to class-vanguards, this external oppression by “plutocratic” nations against “proletarian” ones reflects itself in unfair concessions in warfare and colonialism, as well as in the concentration of international finance in a few countries. The Italian Fascist formulation of Italy as a “proletarian nation” weakened by “plutocratic” nations in the West illustrates the idea that a currently weak nation can have an inherent, historical strength to it, and thus can (and should) advance further. To expand on this idea: the Italian Fascist could view Italy as a proletarian nation (weakened, but previously great and destined for future greatness), while Abyssinia (Ethiopia) is a “nation” in name only, having never been great and incapable of future greatness, and is thus open for invasion.

Unlike class-vanguards, nation-vanguards are not necessarily exclusivist in their views of national greatness or historical importance of other nations, although nation-vanguards often point to the deficiencies (and especially decadence) of other former or current “great” nations. Moreover, nation-vanguards may respect other “great” nations, even if noting that the qualities that are worthwhile in the other country are not transferable and/or beneficial to their own country. For a Fascist intellectual such as Camillo Pellizzi, Italy’s rise would involve conflicts with other empires, specifically the United Kingdom, Germany, and the United States (see Gregor 2005: 176). Having said that, “lower” nations or populations that, though organized, are not viewed as “nations” receive no respect from nation-vanguards, and are often targets for national expansion. Under this view, these population groups are either “historyless” (thus lacking the civilizational basics of nationhood) or are “nations” with inherent, internal deficiencies (perhaps aggravated by internal

decadence) that will prevent them from ever advancing to be “great” nations. Both types, therefore, are fair game for conquest by the greater nation.

### **History: Cycles; “Corso Ricorso”**

Although still structured along Hegelian lines, the notion of History among nation-vanguards is also influenced by the ideas of Giambattista Vico, especially as reflected through the works of Georges Sorel, as well as the pessimism of Oswald Spengler. As explicated by David Ohana, Vico believed:

Human history creates its own world by itself, and in order to understand the culture and history that human beings create, we must use philology to explore the hidden layers of human civilization: internalized values, suppressed myths, prevalent traditions, written laws and conventional language. If humanity creates its own history, then idea and reality are identical. ... Human civilization repeats its forms of behavior with different contents. One can discern a snail-like motion of history, which alternatively progresses and retreats – *corso ricorso*.

(Ohana 2009b: 18)

Vico’s ideas provide two key elements for nation-vanguard thought: the connection between idea and reality (explicated below), and the cyclical notion of history. Note, however, that this *corso ricorso* view appears in nationalist ideas used among nation-vanguards even outside of Europe, such as Darwish al-Miqdadi’s notion of “the cycle of apathy and that of awakening (*dawr al-ghafla wa dawr al-yaqza*)” (Choueiri 2000: 35). For our purposes, the *corso ricorso* idea follows the vanguardist view of History with some modification. Varying from the description in Chapter 2, nation-vanguards see History as a “cycle” where nations will rise and fall, rather than a purely linear view of History as heading in only one specific direction. Indeed, this cyclical idea of History is an area of overlap for both nation-vanguards and nationalistic militias. For nation-vanguards, however, the particular circumstances of the present – and the qualities of the epistemologically-privileged nation – permits the creation of something truly new: the creation of the “New Man” and the beginning of a radically new era. By seeing the dynamics of History, nation-vanguards often believe that the cycle can be “broken”, or at least radically revised, through the “rebirth” of the nation along vanguardist lines. This combination creates an odd, and yet internally consistent, view of History as being cyclical and linear simultaneously. Combining contemporary epistemological clarity with the will to act, the past becomes alive in the present as a means to create the future:

The history of a past is impossible if it is found unintelligible ... Between the personages of history and ourselves there must be a common language,

a common mentality, an identity of problems, of interests, of thought. This means that it must pertain to one and the same world with ourselves, to one and the same process of reality. History, therefore, is not already realized when we set out on our historical research; it is our own life in act.

(Gentile 1922: 50)

In a similar vein, various Arab nation-vanguards would take a similar view of the role of history, derived from Darwish al-Miqdadi's notion of the "presentness" of history (see Choueiri 2000: 33–40).

*Corso ricorso* for nation-vanguards reflects the ongoing struggle that exists in History. Rather than a conflict between classes, this struggle becomes one against external infiltration, but also against internal decay, as noted above. But there is a specific manner in which nation-vanguards view their own nation, and the current conditions of national struggle create a dynamic that fits well within the vanguardist system: specifically, the roles of *degeneration* and *rebirth*. Often inspired by the pessimistic analysis of Oswald Spengler (Spengler 1926; Spengler 1928; Farrenkopf 2001: 281–284), the main concern was over the degeneration occurring within the nation. Under a simple notion of cycles, the fate of the nation is sealed – degeneration is natural and necessary, and the nation must die. But the activity of struggle, in particular for the epistemologically-privileged nation, can overcome this degeneration and create a reborn nation: "A new cycle of organic development would begin once the corporate organisation of national life had been established, a total *integration* of economic, social, political and cultural activity that would bring a totality of purpose to national life" (Linehan 2005: 106–107). It is in this aim for "rebirth" in the midst of degeneration, acting to either "jumpstart" a new cycle or indeed "break" the usual cycle of decay that the vanguardist notion of History enters in. Roger Griffin's explication of "palingenetic myth" (Griffin 1993: 32–44; Griffin 2007: 117–121) in nationalist movements provides a useful understanding of this break: although the nation-vanguards hold a cyclical view, their additional belief in willed rebirth of the nation against the cycle prevents them from simply falling into Spenglerian fatalism of inevitable decline. For nation-vanguards, the desire for rebirth often focuses upon a particular event that is perceived as an example of degeneration and oppression after a previous success; for the Italian Fascists, for instance, the "theft" of Fiume from Italy by the victorious powers after the First World War provides such an event.<sup>6</sup>

As with vanguardism generally, the epistemologically-privileged nation cannot, on its own, break the cycle and escape decadence. Often in this perspective, the mass population itself already shows signs of decadence, illustrated in terms of lack of activity, selfishness, or mimicking foreign practices and cultures. The integration of the nation, therefore, requires the guidance of the vanguard party, which can discipline and direct the nation through the knowledge of History and through strength of will to act. By seeing the signs of degeneration early enough, the "elites" of the national idea (elites here being the functional equivalent of the

“advanced cadre” in class-vanguardism) counteract decadence and increase/maintain national strength. As long as the vanguard actively engages to prevent decadence and solidifies the new national myth in the epistemologically-privileged nation, the nation theoretically could be prominent indefinitely. The historical dynamic destines the chosen nation to rise and fall, but through will and discipline, the nation-vanguard can prevent the fall, at least theoretically.<sup>7</sup> It is to the “science” of myth that we now turn.

### ***Science: “Myth”/“Idea” of Nation***

All nation-vanguards base themselves on a “historical” analysis of some “spirit”, “genius”, or “idea” of the nation; in other words, on the “myth” of nation. As noted in Chapter 3, this “myth” idea is usually associated with the works of Georges Sorel, although the importance of the “idea” or “myth” can also be found from other authors of the time. Usually associated with the emotive rather than the rational, “myth” is often interpreted as a means of creating motivation in mass populations toward action, regardless of the truth content of the myth itself; the myth’s ability to generate action, in a sense, becomes its measure of “truth”. But within vanguardism, especially nation-vanguardism, the “myth” of the nation is not merely a motivational device. In the words of *Origins and Doctrine of Fascism*,

The ideal nation – that in the very awareness of its being, incarnates and reveals itself in, and to, few individuals or in a single individual – is more real than the factual nation that might exist, at any given time, in the awareness of ignorant and unknowing multitudes.

(*Gentile 2002 [1928]: 35*)

Myth takes on two roles as the “science” of nation-vanguards: the first role is the motivational (in line with Sorel’s reasoning), while the second role also involves what the nation *can* be – or, more to the point, what the nation truly *is* – which can be understood only through the myth.

This form of “science” focused on the “idea” or “myth” of the nation often entails a heavy emphasis on historical analysis. Obviously, this is not scholarly historiography, nor is it perceived as such by nation-vanguards. Some forms of scholastic historiography can be useful, of course – Anderson’s “imagined communities” view (2016) would not be that terribly shocking to many national vanguardists, and would likely be considered true to the point of truistic – but they can at best serve as tools for a “deeper” understanding of history. It is the myth of the nation – the driving image that impels action – that matters, not a scholastic analysis of its “truth”. The influence of Georges Sorel is especially strong here. He presents myth as

anticipations of the future ... which enclose with them, all the strongest inclinations of a people, of a party or of a class, inclinations which recur to

the mind with the insistence of instincts in all the circumstances of life; and which give an aspect of complete reality to the hopes of immediate action by which, more easily than by any other method, men can reform their desires, passions, and mental activity

(Sorel 2004 [1950]: 125)

The myth provides a view of the future that energizes and unifies a population. While Sorel appears to imply that the content of the myth – and the population to which it is directed – is a matter of indifference, nation-vanguards instead see such myths as reflecting reality, albeit in an idealist sense. One can also hear echoes of this idea in Bergson's vitalism, when he notes "In order that our consciousness shall coincide with something of its principle, it must detach itself from the *already-made* and attach itself to the *being-made*" (Bergson 1998 [1911]: 237). For nation-vanguards, the myth is the *being-made* in consciousness – the new and higher form of existence – that supersedes the *already-made* of the existing nation (the focus of conservative nationalists). "Myth" is the idea of both what the nation essentially *is* while also being a vision of what the nation *can and should be*. More instrumentally, myth can be defined as an idea and/or concept that serves as a unifying element for a population, and thus providing solidarity, unity of action, and motivation for self-sacrifice. This "myth" provides a story of what the nation is, what it has been, and (with dedicated effort) what it should be.<sup>8</sup> Such a thing is probably necessary for any type of national unity – one can view the notion of "the American Dream" or the drive toward "Pax Britannia", as instances of "myth" (but see Gentile 2006: 16–44) – but nation-vanguards have a stronger view of the role of "myth". Myth combines determinism and voluntarism for nation-vanguards; the "story" of the nation provides the boundaries and general trajectory, but it is the *will* of the nation (as exemplified by its leaders) that can push the nation toward its historical destiny (see Cannistraro 1972). The "science" of historical analysis, then, is the ability to see (as well as direct) the nation-unifying myth toward national destiny. The "story" of the myth without will is merely a team-building exercise; the will for the myth without the story is simple adventurism: both together form historical science.

The "science" of understanding History, therefore, cannot be based in typical forms of historical analysis, as they are too limited (and in a sense too "bourgeois") to understand the "essence" of nation. As it is myth, both in presenting the ideal future as well as creating present activity, that drives the epistemologically-privileged population, the "science" must be engaged dialectically with the myth itself: to borrow Bergson's words, "the normal work of the intellect is far from being disinterested. We do not aim generally at knowledge for the sake of knowledge, but in order to take sides, to draw profit – in short, to satisfy an interest" (Bergson 1999 [1912]: 38–39). Deriving from multiple sources, including the notion of "myth" from Sorel and the vitalism of Bergson (with the Actualism of Giovanni Gentile playing a significant role in the Italian case), engagement with



the myth – in effect, being an advocate for the myth and for the new world it promises – are necessary preconditions both in understanding the nation as well as in finding the best means for social revolution. In other words, the emotional and motivational aspects of the myth are just as, or perhaps even more, important as the rational understanding of this national idea.

Although most nation-vanguards operate within the broad infrastructure noted above, variations arise from the differences in the elements that are central to the notion of nation. These central elements can differ widely, including language, history, “culture” (often connected to language and history), national geography, and even some elements of ethnic connection (although these can easily blur into a race-based, rather than nation-based, ideology). Language provides insight into the “genius” and uniqueness of the nation, explicit most notably in national poetry and art (see Mussolini 1923 [1920]: 114). History binds and connects the nation, while also providing the guiding stories and “narrative” of the category; this is the main difference between the Jacobin “People” in the abstract and the nation-vanguard notion of “The People” in a concrete sense. As a “story” of a people’s development – moving from isolation/humiliation/fragmentation toward a unified, powerful, and advanced country – history and its study becomes the guiding force for understanding what the nation is and where it should be going. In practice, the “science” of nation-vanguards is a mixture of these elements.

### ***Totalism: Communal (National) Nature of Humanity***

Based upon the view of humanity as communal in nature, nation-vanguards view the *corso ricorso* dynamic of History as permeating all aspects of human existence. Where class-vanguards see humans as social beings connected together via economic conditions, nation-vanguards view the social nature of humanity via the “embeddedness” of a person within a broader cultural/linguistic/historical totality. Also similar to class-vanguards, nation-vanguards place the role of nation in a historical context; rather than an eternal category, “nation” has developed over time, and required the social activity of multiple generations, to become what it is. In itself, one might think the social nature of human beings might lead to a view of universal human community along the lines of cosmopolitanism. However, the view of humanity community maximizes itself, in this view, with the nation; the nation is prior to and superior to any specific individual within the community, even the leader who embodies the national “idea”. The culture, language, history, and mores of a nation encompass the individual completely, truly making him/her “human” in the fullest sense. A universal community is an impossibility, as all of humanity cannot share these constitutive traits that the nation creates within its members. The totality of existence, therefore, goes beyond the individual level to the collective, national level; the dynamics of the social world are those that develop in the interactions between collectivities of nations rather than individuals.

While nation is the central category, at least some nation-vanguards take the perspective that “nation” could also become a more encompassing category than it is presently;<sup>9</sup> but this perspective usually emphasizes the nation as broader than the state, perhaps best exemplified in the pan-Arab formulation of nationalism in the Middle East (see Dawisha 2003). But even with such a change, the nation-vanguardist believes that the whole of social existence is shaped, directed, and perceived from a cultural (and in effect, national) perspective. A person is born into a national culture, is shaped by it at a fundamental level, and cannot escape from it; even the person who renounces his/her national culture will then identify with a similar system (such as another nation, or a “place-holder” like class or some type of cosmopolitanism), and will still always be guided by his/her upbringing even against his/her will.

In contrast to liberal notions of nationalism, the key defining human quality in nation-vanguardism is the human as a social, culture-bearing entity, and this sociability and culture are themselves defined and shaped nationally. Many liberal writers would not disagree about these observations (Burke 1999 [1790]), but the different starting-points between nationalist liberals and nation-vanguards lead to significantly divergent notions of interaction in the totality. For the liberal thinker, the individual and his/her preferences will be shaped by such a cultural/national attributes, but in the end the individual will make decisions based on a self-interested calculation of benefits and costs; *individual* interest is key. The nation-vanguardist, on the other hand, sees interest as a collective, not individual, matter; the style of individualistic decision-making reflects both selfishness as well as foolishness, as it does not recognize the individual’s essential connection to the broader nation in making him/her into a human, thus leading to an anarchy of limited and self-interested individuals. In Mussolini’s words,

Democracy thought to make itself indispensable to the masses, and did not understand that the masses despise those who have not the courage to be what they ought to be. Democracy has taken ‘elegance’ from the lives of the people, but Fascismo brings it back; that is to say, it brings back color, force, picturesqueness, the unexpected, mysticism, and in fact all that counts in the souls of the multitude.

(1923 [1922]: 168)

A human being, when fully actualized, is a part of a larger national collective, in the view of the nation-vanguard. Who, then, is the Enemy? While taking various names, the Enemy for this form of vanguardism can best be labeled the “non-national”.

### ***Enemy: The “Non-National” (Cosmopolitan/Foreign)***

In distinction to vanguard groups focused on class or race (but similar to those emphasizing subaltern populations), the Enemy population in nation-vanguardism

is comparatively ambiguous. It would be far too simplistic to say that the Enemy is the “foreign” (except perhaps in very xenophobic groups, such as the North Korean regime in its nationalistic phase), insofar as many nation-vanguards place strong value on incorporating some types of foreign insights within their own society, especially revolving around technology. Moreover, respect for other “active” or “engaged” nations is not unknown among nation-vanguard parties. Additionally, various nation-vanguard groups sought to connect with like-minded groups across national boundaries, as in the case of the attempted creation of a “Fascist International” in 1934 (see Payne 1995: 229). It is the “non-national” nature of the Enemy that makes it so dangerous and/or repulsive to nation-vanguards; by lacking a national consciousness within the vanguard’s own nation or lacking any sense of national consciousness at all, the Enemy is viewed as fundamentally opposed human sociability (as revealed in the collective nation) and therefore as an existential threat.

It is when the “foreign” fundamentally undermines the national “idea” that enmity arises. In this sense, the problematic form of “foreign” is connected to a “non-national” mentality, one often connected to a type of post-national cosmopolitanism. The entry of non-national ideas and customs helps trigger and expand the decadence within the nation. The decay of the nation is premised, therefore, on the entrance of the “foreign”: in the case of Arab nation-vanguards, “signs of decline in science and industry, and traditional accretions of mystical beliefs, were considered the result of a process of adulteration, set in motion by the ascendancy of non-Arab ethnicities” (Choueiri 2000: 73). However, “cosmopolitan” or “foreign” does not necessarily mean an individual or group living outside of national territory. Nation-vanguards focused on national groups with extended diaspora populations may view these expatriates as still “in” the nation, and thus aim to bring these extraterritorial populations into the broader national “idea” (as in the case of the “Fasci Italiani all’Esterio”—see Gentile 2003: 145–160; Caprariis 2000). In this merging of “foreign” and “cosmopolitan”, one could define the nation-vanguard Enemy population as those individuals who reject the nation: specifically, those who reject the particular nation of the vanguard, as well as those who reject “nation” as the central category of human existence.

Regardless of the specific variations between nation-vanguards, the Enemy population is a threat insofar as it decays or perverts the essential “myth” of the nation, partially in how the nation has developed in history, but more importantly in undermining the “idea” of the nation that is heading toward a new era of human civilization. Although other factors, such as defeats at the hands of “plutocratic” nations, may have accelerated decadence within the nation, it is the influx of “non-national” elements that is accused of threatening or debilitating the nation, requiring the nation-vanguard to arrive on the scene to “save” the country. As noted above, the totality of human existence is founded on social solidarity based within the nation: entities that present themselves as “beyond” or “against” the nation *qua* nation are viewed as inherently antagonistic and

adversarial. Indeed, nation-vanguards believe that populations following such “nationless” ideas – be it transnational capitalists focused on business or socialists emphasizing class-based internationalism – are, in a sense, acting in a decidedly non-human or even anti-human manner. By denying the centrality of nation, the Enemy population undermines the strength and unity within the country, and does so for anti-national (and, often implied, selfish) reasons. By putting the interests of one’s own business or class ahead of the collective good of the nation, the non-national Enemy saps the nation of needed resources and morale. More to the point, the Enemy objectively serves as an ally of other nations; although the business-focused individualist or the class-focused worker may subjectively think that s/he is acting in a manner “beyond” the nation, in actual fact, s/he instead is aiding competing nations in the struggle of History by undermining the nation in which they exist. The non-national ideas and activities of the Enemy population – whether based on class, liberalism, “human progress”, or any other post-national ideology – appears to nation-vanguards as an ideological “virus”, existing parasitically on healthy “hosts” (nations and national culture) while simultaneously “killing” the host (by fostering degeneration) that gives the virus sustenance. To expand this metaphor: other nations can be viewed as similar to a wild animal encountered in nature, which can be dangerous (a mountain lion), sometimes dangerous but sometimes helpful (a dog), benign and harmless (a chipmunk), or weak and useful for oneself (a prey animal, like a rabbit). The Enemy population, however, is more like a virus: never helpful, always harmful, and also more insidious than any “animal” (other nation) insofar as it is invisible, with the “infection” (decay) often having progressed greatly before one even realizes the virus is there.

Let us consider two examples of this foreign/cosmopolitan Enemy population: class-based vanguards (most especially Communists) and the “bad” bourgeoisie. Although the highly antagonistic relationship between nation-vanguards and class-vanguards is well-known, the reasons for this antagonism are perhaps less well understood.<sup>10</sup> Class-vanguards with a proletarian focus, particularly those operating within a Marxist framework, explicitly argue that “nation” is at best a vestige of an earlier time, with the cross-national category of class being primary in human interaction. For the nation-vanguard, this nationless class-fixation both misunderstands human interaction while simultaneously undermining the foundations of true human solidarity. In other words, nation-vanguards perceive the Marxist class idea to be bad sociology, and that acting on such bad sociology leads to subversion and destruction. By attempting to weaken (and, optimally, eliminate) national distinctions, nation-vanguards believe the class-based ideology is corrosive and anti-human in its essence, made all the worse by the activities of organizations (of any type) acting under such a view. This does not mean that the proletariat itself is an Enemy; rather, workers who emphasize class over nation fall into the Enemy camp, while those emphasizing nation over class are viewed as valued members of the community.

Similarly, the bourgeoisie is separated into “good” (national) and “bad” (cosmopolitan) types. For most nation-vanguards, the bourgeois itself is a potentially suspect group: historically traders and middlemen between nations, they often act as carriers and proponents of foreign or nationless mores and ideas that undermine national strength. If members of the bourgeoisie base their economic aims and trade on increasing the power and prestige of the nation, they are a “national” bourgeoisie that should be praised and honored as productive members of the country. However, if the bourgeoisie acts in a blatantly “liberal” fashion – in other words, basing themselves on individualistic self-interest and/or perceiving themselves as part of a cosmopolitan population of traders who have moved beyond “nation” – they are an infection in the country and a key Enemy to be curtailed, especially as the “bad” bourgeoisie provides aid to the “plutocratic” nations of the world against their own nation.<sup>11</sup> Structurally, the cosmopolitan bourgeoisie is an Enemy in the exact same way as the class-vanguardist, differing only in coming from the bourgeoisie instead of the working class. The more important differences, however, are in motivation and organization: proletarian movements, being collectivistic, maintain a unity and energy that makes them an active threat, while the bad bourgeoisie, being individualistic, tends instead to sap the strength of the nation through its indecisiveness, lack of will, and inability to move beyond the anarchy of private interest.

Areas that are fit for conquest – such as Abyssinia by the Italian Fascists – do not generally fit within the Enemy category. These areas for imperial expansion are usually viewed as populated by communities that do not reach the level of “nation” or are the types of “historyless” nations that are doomed to disappearance and sublimation under active nations. Lacking the ability, materially and ideationally, to confront the nation in a fundamental manner, nation-vanguards view these populations either with indifference or as targets of opportunity. While these populations are viewed as inferior to the epistemologically-privileged nation, they are not perceived with the rancor and hatred reserved for the Enemy population.

Both to lead the national epistemologically-privileged population as well as to curtail the non-national Enemy, the vanguard party is needed. While the party itself is important, nation-vanguards often turn to the one who best epitomizes and realizes the national myth: the Leader.

### ***Vanguard Party: Leadership Principle***

The party remains important even after political power is attained. In the case of the Italian Fascists, to counteract the focus on “the State” (at points overshadowing the attention to “the nation”), the party was a key institution in connecting to the epistemologically-privileged population: “The party was the ‘dynamic, political, anti-bureaucratic’ element of the state; without its vitality, the state would perish” (Germino 1959: 19). The party itself would be manned by the most advanced

of the “national” population: individuals who internalized and understood the national “myth”, as well as possessing the energy, vitality, and activism to put the myth into action. As Alfredo Rocco explains in the case of Italy, “fascism insists that the government be entrusted to men capable of rising above their private interests and of realizing the aspirations of the social collectivity, considered in its unity and in its relation to past and future” (Rocco 2000 [1925]: 114). The party, in effect, acts as the leader of the epistemologically-privileged nation, with a hierarchical arrangement within the party itself to determine the areas of responsibility of any given party member. This leadership focus is in many ways the embodiment of the national movement itself. Influenced by the “trenchocracy” notion from the First World War, there is an idea that the nation itself “moves” in the direction desired (the national “myth”), while the leaders provide guidance, in terms of direction as well as vitality, in this movement. One gets an impression of this unified “movement” from Ernst Jünger’s recollections of the First World War, writing that: “Our success had a magical effect. There was no question of leadership, or even separate units, but there was only one direction: forward! Every man ran forward for himself” (Jünger 2003 [1920]: 236). Partially, this focus on leadership also results from the requirements of revolution, especially for those formed in the ideas of warfare. In the case of Mussolini, he

came to the conclusion that the defense of the country, the promotion of its influence, and the requirements of a revolution in the true sense (that is, one like the French Revolution or the first stage of the Russian Revolution, which was patriotic and took up the defense of the nation) necessitated a dictatorship.

*(Sternhell 1994: 220)*

As the dynamics of History are based in struggle, a similar dynamic (to an extent) occurs within the party itself: “Fascist ideology extolled fierce combat as the highest and most heroic form of human activity” (Germino 1959: 47), which led to a competitive seeking after leadership. The vanguard of the nation reaches its pinnacle with the guidance of the Leader – the most advanced of the advanced nationals, the Leader epitomizes the internalization of the national “idea”, of the mix of the past and future, and the vitalist energy and activism that brings the “myth” into reality. Although speaking generally, Mussolini’s words perhaps best describe the qualities of such a leader:

Fascism requires the actor, the human being loaded with all the powers of the will: powerful and mindful of all difficulties and prepared to face them. For him, life is struggle; for it is the lot of the human being to conquer life, which truly possesses value to him.

*(quoted in Buchheim 2004: 226)*

The focus on leadership does not always lead to submission to the highest leader, at least as first. The tensions between Mussolini and various parts of the Fascist party illustrate this difficulty:

There were two sources to these tensions: a functional one, in that Mussolini had different responsibilities as party leader than the local *ras* and therefore saw things differently; and a personal one, in that Mussolini was more inclined to “normalize” relations with traditional conservatives than were some of his hotheaded followers.

(Paxton 2004: 132)

However, the logic of nation-vanguardism, emphasizing the importance of struggle, strength, and unity, makes the focus on a singular Leader at the top of the party almost a necessity.

In contrast to the leadership focus in a military junta or in a form of “Caesarism” (see Baehr 2008), where it is the leader himself and his charisma that unifies his followers (be it in the population or in the military), the leadership principle in nation-vanguardism intimately connects to the national myth and party organization while simultaneously extolling the qualities of the Leader himself. As Germino expresses this idea, “The Third Rome, the inner-worldly millenium, had arrived, and its prophet and *dux* was pursuing his work of universal redemption” (Germino 1964: 118). The Leader exemplifies the national myth, and through his strength of will and activity, directs the epistemologically-privileged nation (through the vanguard party) toward its higher level of existence. As with all vanguard types, however, the Leader’s strength and ability is directly related to the nation’s mass population itself; even if the superlatives used to describe the Leader (“genius”, superhuman”, and the like) are partially accurate, his world-historic activities are only possible in his union with the national idea and its mass population. Alone, this man as an individual may be capable of great feats, but as the epitome of the epistemologically-privileged nation and its vanguard party, this Leader can assist History in changing the world.

For most nation-vanguards, the practice of democratic centralism becomes their theory – in other words, the organizational system of national vanguards usually follows some form of leadership principle (but also see Settembrini 1976). These organizations will also focus on the importance of institutions, such as committees or councils, but these are significantly weaker than those in class-vanguard groups. One might call this the distinction between *praxis* and action: proper *praxis* requires theoretical insights, while action requires the will to act. As such, *praxis* can be done by committee, while action requires a single will to lead other wills. In practice, class-vanguards often fall into a leader principle – following a Lenin, Stalin, Mao, or Tito – but still maintain some committee structure that, even at its weakest, often still has some level of importance and legitimacy. Nation-vanguards, on the other hand, will emphasize the importance of the single will of the leader,

with other institutions and councils serving in an advisory or implementation capacity. While the need for institutions that would create the leaders (and Leader) of tomorrow are a matter of importance to nation-vanguards (see Germino 1959: 47–61), the focus on the current Leader's will-to-power and action generally obscures the planning the making of future leaders. This is central: as the knowledge and raised consciousness of the vanguards of class give them their elite status in the movement, so too the strength of will and nearly mystical connection to the national "myth" is what gives the national vanguard its pride of place.

Nation-vanguard organizations have a notable structural weakness compared to class-vanguard groups as a result of this leadership principle: specifically, the lack of a clear succession process. As so much of the organization is subsumed under the will of the leader, it is not enough to have an institutional framework (although even such institutional matters are, in many national vanguard groups, significantly underdeveloped). Somehow, an individual of similar will and vision must come to the forefront. But as leaders of this type, even by the organization's standards, are few and far between, there is an overwhelming likelihood that the organization will not be able to outlive its leader for very long. As the committee system still exists in class-vanguard groups and is used as a means of creating potential future leaders, succession can be more peaceful. Even in cases where the leader's power is nearly absolute (such as Stalin and Mao), the existence of the Politburo structure permitted a succession that appeared legitimate.

## Conclusion

The vanguards of class and nation share many similarities – more, indeed, than followers of either would want to acknowledge. However, a major difference between the two vanguards is the basis of their populations: the class-vanguard are "materialist" insofar as the economic structure serves as the foundational basis for the epistemologically-privileged population, while nation-vanguards are "idealists" in their focus on culture. It is thus an interesting quirk in history that nation-vanguard parties would often work with a strongly "materialist" form of vanguardism: specifically, those based upon race.

## Notes

- 1 The word "citizen", while often used to denote a similar idea, is too limited in this context, as its connotations are of civic/political membership, without necessarily deeper foundations (as is essential for nation-vanguards).
- 2 For both types of groups, propaganda also serves the cause of recruitment of additional cadres to the party or the militia, but here again, the form of recruitment varies notably between these types.
- 3 While already familiar in Italian nation-vanguardism, one sees a similar idea in, for instance, the Arab nation-vanguardism of Ba'athism, where "once the Arabs are liberated and united, class conflict will somehow melt away (*tadhwiib*)" (Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett 2003: 89).



- 4 One can see an example of these contrasts in a nation-vanguard's perspective on "Americanism" (as an exemplification of various modern traits): see Gentile 1993.
- 5 For disputes within Italy on Gentile's place among the Fascists, see Tarquini 2005. Also see Fogu 2003.
- 6 Such events fit well with Manus Midlarsky's idea of "ephemeral gains", which "occurs when a severe loss (territory, population) or threats of its imminent occurrence, typically perceived as a catastrophe, is preceded by a period of societal gain, which in turn is preceded by a period of subordination" (Midlarsky 2011: 25). This type of "ephemeral gain" appears frequently with nation-vanguards, as well as among other forms of nationalist movements.
- 7 In a way, this view of "breaking" the cycle (or at least indefinitely postponing decline) is almost Ciceronian in its formulation. But there are two main differences. First, Cicero emphasized the importance of constitutional balance and institutional reform for extending national life; nation-vanguards put greater emphasis on the will and vision of the vanguard (and especially its leader) as well as the disciplining of the mass population to national (rather than individual) pursuits. Second, Cicero's notion of postponing decline is, in many ways, inherently conservative, while nation-vanguards often emphasize radical change.
- 8 In a sense, a similar formulation – though with a much different intention behind it – would be the "narrative" reasoning explicated by Alasdair MacIntyre (1988). For an example of this style of thinking in practice for a population (specifically, Christian groups), see Hauerwas 1983.
- 9 For instance, Carl Schmitt argued that the interacting dynamics of nation and technological advancement would lead to larger interstate (yet in a sense national) "blocs" (as in his discussions on *Großraum*) leading to smaller/lesser nations being subsumed and assimilated into the larger national blocs (consider Schmitt 2003: 324–335). Although Schmitt was German and would later join the race-based Nazi party, one can make a strong case that he was more inclined toward nation-based systems in the style of Italian Fascism over race-based systems (see Balakrishnan 2000). For an excellent analysis of Schmitt, see Herrero 2007.
- 10 Generally, previous discussions of these disputes emphasized the *Realpolitik* aspects of both types competing for political power in a given nation and/or across Europe, or instead emphasized the role of patriotism in nationalist self-identity.
- 11 Both nation-vanguards and class-vanguards share a similar hostility to cross-national "finance capitalism"; for the former, this nationalism form of capitalism leads to the creation of "proletarian nations", while class-vanguards see this "latest" form of capitalism as part of the broader dynamic of "imperialism" (a view shared by many subaltern-vanguards).

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# 6

## VANGUARD OF RACE

...for the noteworthy fact about all reforms is that at first they possess but a single champion yet many million supporters. They aim has often been for centuries the inner longing of hundreds of thousands, until one man stands up to proclaim such a general will, and as a standard-bearer guides the old longing to victory in the form of the new idea.

—*Adolf Hitler (1999[1927]: 330)*

The third major form of vanguardism in the first half of the twentieth century perceived the epistemologically-privileged population as being based in biology, specifically in “race”. As with the forms based on class or nation, the race version operated within a political/cultural context where non-vanguardist forms existed (see Black 2003: 235–240), and continues to do so in the present (such as those involved with the New Century Foundation in the United States: see Taylor 2011; Swain and Nieli 2003: 88–113). But as with the other versions, it was the vanguardist form – where ideology and organizational structure combine – that pursued power with a disturbing vitality and startling success. Similar to nation-vanguards in their evocation of “primal” or internal drives, but also overlapping with class-vanguards in their inherent materialism, the vanguard of race sees the “blood” (genetic constitution, evolutionary development, or the like) of the “superior” race as providing epistemological access to History’s dynamic of evolutionary struggle, as well as the means for the species to “advance” to its next level.

This chapter will examine race-vanguards, explicating the ideology and the organizational structures for their parties and groups.<sup>1</sup> However, before discussing the vanguard of race itself, we must return briefly to the vanguard of nation. Because of their historical alliances, especially in the period of the Second World

War, there is a tendency to perceive nation- and race-vanguards as effectively of the same type. Under this view, the not-minor differences between the two forms are a matter of degree rather than different forms, with nationvanguards being a “softer” version and those of race a “harder” variety. This view, at first glance, appears adequate. But to fully understand both of them, and their characteristics compared to other vanguard types, it is important to examine the fundamental and significant differences between these two forms.

## Distinguishing between Vanguards of Race and Nation

The line between nation-vanguards and race-vanguards can be blurry, both in their theories and in practice. At the domestic and international levels, alliances between the two types of vanguards are well known in history, the most infamous being the collaboration between the nationalist Italian Fascists and the racist Nazi party, with additional linkages to groups such as the Iron Cross of Romania as well as the Falangists in Spain.<sup>2</sup> Other groups appear to be race and nation vanguards simultaneously, such as the Klu Klux Klan in the United States.<sup>3</sup> Philosophically, both types of groups also correspond in their arguments and styles. A significant overlap comes in shared diagnosis of decline and “decadence”, often pulling from the same sources (Spengler, Gumpłowicz); the main difference is the mechanism of this “degradation”. While nation-vanguards point to foreign cultural or social influences, race-vanguards see decline as a degradation of racial “stock” on a biological level. Teasing out this difference can be difficult, as often these two types of vanguards are using similar (or even the same) language, but with nuances that lead to significant differences.<sup>4</sup> Nation-vanguards usually focus on decline as it relates to the “essential” national characteristics of culture and language (which may take on an ethnic inflection in some cases); for race-vanguards, decline is a biological and genetic issue, where the fundamental “stock” of the race is being decayed (which then decays behaviors and mores attached to the race). A similar issue of overlap comes from the importance of “rebirth” from decadence, which plays a significant role in the rhetoric and ideas of both of these vanguard types, as noted by Roger Griffin (Griffin 1993: 32–40; also see Griffin 2005). This idea of rebirth emphasizes “bring[ing] about collective redemption, a new national community, a new society, a new man. Their goal was rebirth, a ‘palinogenesis’ brought about not through suprahuman agency, but engineered through the power of the modern state” (Griffin 2007: 8). However, the reasons behind degeneration – and the proper means of bringing about renewal – vary in nuanced ways between race- and nation-vanguards. In practice, the similarities permitted the types of overlaps one sees, for instance, in the interactions between blatantly racist groups and more nationalistic Volkish groups in Germany (Mosse 1998).

In various cases, disentangling nation-vanguards and race-vanguards is not simple.<sup>5</sup> In some “border” cases, separating the elements may be impossible; the

individuals or groups themselves may not distinguish “race” and “nation” clearly enough to make a distinction possible.<sup>6</sup> An example of this difficulty is the unique case of the Iron Guard of Romania (for an overview, see Weber 1966; Ioanid 2005). An initial investigation of this group might lead one to view them as nation-vanguards, given their emphasis on the nation as well as their comparatively unique explicit identification with a traditional religion (in this case, Orthodox Christianity). However, further analysis shows how entrenched and foundational the view of race – as Aryan-Thracians – created the basis for the Legionary system. That the Iron Guard mixed nation and race (along with religion) intimately in its ideology makes it unique, but also illustrates how these different category bases could be merged. There is a standard, however, by which race-vanguards and nation-vanguards can be distinguished.

The key difference between race and nation is that between materialism and idealism. Specifically, the epistemologically-privileged category in nation-vanguardism usually emphasizes the role of language, culture, social mores, and a host of ideational connections (shaped by material circumstances, certainly, but not founded upon this materialism). For race-vanguards, on the other hand, the mass population of concern is foundationally dependent upon materiality, even if this base expresses itself in cultural or ideational ways: the materialism of biological race. In this way, the race-based view in many ways shares greater similarities to the class-based category than it does to the nation-based ones. First, both the class and race populations have materiality as the foundation of their social existence; the former based on economic position in the conflict of classes, the other based on biological position in the struggle of the fittest. This may seem curious, as the mysticism of many race-vanguards – such as Rosenberg, Himmler, or representatives of the Christian Identity movement (Luhrssen 2012: 149–176; Quarles 2004; Gardell 2003; Barkun 1997) – is well-known. One must keep in mind that even these mystical forms of thinking still have as their basis the materialist substratum of racial “material” to make it possible. Also, one can see some similar forms of mysticism beginning to arise in various class-vanguards (such as the *Bogostroitelstvo* [‘God-building’] movement in the early period after the October Revolution), with the difference being that the class-vanguardist leadership rather quickly moved against such movements (Stites 1989: 230).<sup>7</sup> Second, counterintuitive as it may appear initially, the race-category shares a type of “cosmopolitanism” with the class-category.<sup>8</sup> The centrality of race membership transcends the “mere” legal constructs and even language constraints that arise through national borders, where those of the same “blood” have more in common with their “brothers” in other countries than with the “degenerate” races or “inferior” members of their own country. In Rosenberg’s words regarding “racial souls”, “Our own blood dictates where our own loyalties lie, and only bloodless pedagogues can prate here about the parity of two great principles” (Rosenberg 2011 [1937]: 36). In this way, the commonality of race can transcend national boundaries in a manner similar to commonality as the basis for proletarian internationalism. Both the race and class

populations stand in contrast with the nation-category, where such internationalism is effectively an impossibility (or, rather, this “shared interest” at most may apply to expatriate populations who have recently emigrated to other countries). A third similarity is the constrained boundaries of the population-category itself. For race-vanguards, the population is effectively locked (a person cannot change his/her biology); while theoretically the class category is not nearly so exclusivist, as discussed in Chapter 4, in practice one’s class origin was almost as fixed as one’s biology. Both of these contrast to the more ambiguous situation of the nation-vanguards, where the population-category can cover a spectrum from exclusivism similar to race-vanguards, to a much broader ability for one to join the nation.<sup>9</sup>

Although this idealism/materialism divide between race and nation is serviceable, language itself can make distinguishing between the two difficult, especially when considering the time period before the late nineteenth century and the advent of popular use of modern biological scientific terminology. In various languages, “race” and “nation” are not clearly differentiated terms, including in the English language. One can see this tendency in the arguments of various Italian Fascists, including Mussolini. While there was a notable group of racialist, or at least eugenicist,<sup>10</sup> thinkers among the Italian Fascists, “race” for most the others often denoted an extension of nation rather than biological categorization, with “race” indicating individuals who shared the culture/language of Italy who may not be directly under the Italian state’s control, including expatriates in other countries or neighboring territories that were “culturally” Italian but under the sovereignty of Austria (Mussolini 1923 [1919]; Roberts 1979: 179–181). Race theorists may also have similar ambiguities in their language, especially in the case of Gumpłowicz (1899 [1885]), but this equivocality is much less evident in the blatant racialist theories of Ludwig Woltmann (Weindling 1989: 118–120, 129–130), Theodore Lothrop Stoddard (Stoddard 1921: 199–209), and Madison Grant (Grant 1922: 16–19, 71), among others (see also Field 1977).

The most notorious of these ambiguities come from Germany and the word “*Volk*”. In earlier works, such as that by Hegel, “*Volk*” usually indicates a type of cultural unity and/or genius that would fit comfortably within nation-vanguardism. But “*Volk*” could also indicate an ethnic or racial overlap, depending on usage. For the Nazi party, “*Volk*” was specifically a racial categorization. Indeed, it was the ambiguity of “*Volk*” as a term that aided in strengthening the Nazi party’s appeal: for racialist audiences, “*Volk*” meant the Aryan race; for *völkisch* groups or *Freikorps* members, “*Volk*” indicated a substantive and “thick” idea of nationhood; while for others, “*Volk*” simply meant an elevated notion of “The People”. The work of Carl Schmitt provides a good example of this ambiguity in practice: starting from a nationalistic perspective similar to Italian Fascism, Schmitt could reinterpret his arguments in a racialist direction upon gaining membership in the Nazi party (Balakrishnan 2000: 202–208).<sup>11</sup> As this ambiguity in language (and in practice) is ongoing between race- and nation-vanguardist systems, examining the materialist or idealist underpinnings of the ideology becomes important in



determining whether a group leans more toward one type or another. With these distinctions in mind, we now turn to the substance of race-vanguardism.

### ***Category: Race***

The epistemologically-privileged category in this type is biological race. It is important to note the modern nature of this view: “The animalistic, naturalistic, human anthropology of the Nazis was strictly a modern concept without any premodern parallels” (Payne 1980: 97). The race itself can be any one – the Aryan race, the broader “white” race, the “cosmic race” of Latin Americans (of Vasconcelos), the “sun people” of Africa (based on a melanin theory of Frances Cress Welsing or Leonard Jeffries), or others – but the centrality of race is key. As the foundational race varies, so does some of the reasoning behind why such a race has access to true reality. For instance, for the “Aryan” notion similar to that found in such work as that by Chamberlain and others (Chamberlain 1911: 262–289; Hecht 2000), the central race is based on biological superiority at the origins of the race itself in its “active” qualities (Herman 1997: 55–61), accentuated by its “creativity” or other traits (Weiss 2010: 241–245). For such a view, the initial “purity” of the race remains, but needs the active involvement of society (and specifically, the vanguard group) to maintain purity against degeneration. This formulation differs from that of Vasconcelos and groups based upon his views (focused on the advancement of “*la raza*”), where the strength of the race comes from its initial mixing of different races (in this case, white and Latin American native races), combining into a “cosmic” race (or “fifth race”: Vasconcelos 1997 [1925]: 9) that is superior to the others. Similar to the Aryan theory, however, the purity of the “cosmic” Hispanic race must now be maintained by various means.

Two key traits of the epistemologically-privileged race are its survivability and its ability to create higher forms of existence (or culture). The dynamic of History as a struggle with Nature and other races makes survivability a necessary but not sufficient criterion for racial superiority. Because of the race’s attributes, its ability to survive and thrive provides it with the insight necessary to expand into environments both natural and social. In Hitler’s words,

If the value of all peoples is not equal, then every people has, aside from its collective numerical value, also a certain specific value that is distinctive and that cannot be completely the same as that of any other people. ... The ultimate expression of this overall valuation is the historical cultural image of a people, in which the sum of all rays of its genetic qualities – or the racial qualities united in it – are reflected.

*(Hitler 2003: 31)*

As with class-vanguards, it is not necessarily some intellectual superiority that provides this epistemological ability (although such superiority is at least strongly

implied), but often indicated by other traits; while class-vanguards, for instance, view the favored class as forming the advanced social relationships necessary for the next stage by their place in the current economic system, race-vanguards believe the favored race is creating advanced social relationships via its place in the current biological struggle for the “fittest” (a type of “action” not dissimilar to class-vanguardist “*praxis*”). How this survivability is achieved intersects with the other key trait: the creation of higher forms of social existence (or “culture”, see Hitler 1999 [1927]: 290), illustrated by such traits as the inclination for collective action (epitomized by self-sacrifice for the benefit of the whole), a rejection of individualism vis-à-vis the aims of the race, the embracing of non-“dogmatic” (perhaps non-“logocentric”) forms of knowledge (Proctor 1998: 226–253; Lenard 1966 [1936]), and a subsuming of self-interest (and to an extent, self-identity) into the higher realm of racial interest and identity (see Peukert 1993: 237).<sup>12</sup> This cultural criterion of superiority is the key characteristic that separates the epistemologically-privileged race from the Enemy race; both are notable for their tenacity at continued survival, but only the former creates the higher culture that permits advanced survival, while the latter achieves survival through parasitically relying on the superior race. By combining these social attributes that enhance survivability, the epistemologically-privileged race has the ability (in Hitler’s phraseology) to “create” culture, while other races at best can “preserve” it and at worst “destroy” it (Hitler 1999 [1927]: 290).

In this sense, social advancement of a group is based inherently upon its racial foundation; thus the superior race can “degenerate” – allowing space for other races to gain some power – but as long as the racial foundation remains, it can “regenerate” toward greatness again. Inferior races, however, can only gain power as a result of the weakness of the superior race, and can never achieve levels beyond their racial capacity.<sup>13</sup> With the exception of Vasconcelos’ view (Vasconcelos 1997 [1925]: 20), race-vanguards rarely believe that racial mixing could ever lead to a superior race; instead, the intermixed would be vastly inferior to the superior race (even if “improving”, to a degree, the inferior one), resulting in “dilution” of the qualities in the superior race. Race is both essentialized and dynamic. On the one hand, race is the foundation for populations and their success or failure; racial configurations are the material bases for society. But on the other hand, race is dynamic, insofar as races vary over history in their “purity”, “degeneration”, and “regeneration”. In other words, race is essential but not static. An additional trait of race, distinct from class and nation, is its inherently finite nature (Pierce 2012: 328–330). Although the race can regenerate, given the proper leadership and circumstances, a critical mass of “pure” race members must exist for the population to achieve its destiny; should the race become “diluted” or even disappear, then no force on Earth can bring it back into existence. Unlike class (where economic conditions can create the epistemologically-privileged population) or nation (as language and culture could be transmitted to new populations over time), the essentialist quality of race requires not only that the race exists now, but also that

some “pure” strain of it has maintained its existence up to the present. This finitude of the race plays a particularly important role in the view of History and its dynamics, discussed below.

Founding itself on a race-based mass population, the internal differentiation of the epistemologically-privileged race shares a similar differentiation apparent in nation-based vanguards, with an elite of the population leading the way. The dynamic of struggle that underlies the race view, however, creates a much stronger and essentialist difference between the mass population and its leaders, based on a form of “stratified egalitarianism”; within the race itself, inequality continues (with the superior members leading the population), but all members of the epistemologically-privileged race are equal insofar as they are superior to other races. In other words, inequalities within the race are differences of degree,<sup>14</sup> while inequalities between races are insurmountable and are differences of kind; for this style of thinking, the average Aryan is superior (at an ontological level) to the highest Slav, for instance. In Hitler’s view,

the ultimate consequence of recognizing the importance of blood – that is, the racial foundation in general – is the transference of this estimation to the individual person. In general, I must evaluate peoples differently on the basis of the race they belong to, and the same applies to the individual men within a national community.

*(Hitler 1999 [1927]: 442)*

Race, of course, is a highly contested concept, with ambiguous categorizations (see Banton 1998). This ambiguity is similar to that found in other vanguard groups. Race-vanguards attempt to categorize in three main ways. The first is genealogical: an individual’s race is determined by ancestry (Burleigh and Wiperman 1991: 49–51), with racial “purity” or mixtures determined by degrees. The second manner is by attributes, categorizing race on the basis of skin coloration, skull shape, behavioral traits (such as “viscerotonia” – see Shipman 1994: 178), and other types of physical measurements. A method that borders strongly with nation-vanguards is cultural: an individual showing certain aptitudes (or failings) indicates racial background (rare, and usually replaced by views of “race traitor” or “outlier” for odd cases). This cultural version easily overlaps with similar measures used by nation-vanguards, and the occasional use of this measure (by either type) can lead to the ambiguity in distinguishing between them. Finally, there is a mixture of the previous types. In practice, categorization usually was based on some configuration of physical measurements and genealogical examination.

As with other epistemologically-privileged mass populations discussed thus far, the movement of the world-historic race is not an isolated or particularistic affair, but one with global implications. The history of race is the history of struggle, and with this struggle comes “universal” benefit for humanity, although not for any given population; in the view of race-vanguards, the conflict between races

“ultimately leads to further evolution of the higher race and the submission ... of the inferior race” (Weikart 2009: 56). It is to this History we now turn.

### ***History: Biological Struggle and Survival***

As David Lane (a member of “The Order”, an American race-vanguard group with origins in the Aryan Nations movement: Quarles 2004: 134) states succinctly, “The highest Law of Nature is the preservation of one’s own kind” (Lane 2008: 30). Human history is an ongoing struggle, both against other races and against nature itself. Through this struggle, the “higher” forms of humanity succeed in survivability, reflected in overcoming limitations of the environment, claiming resources over other competing races, and in setting up new cultural orders that can sustain and advance the race itself. Advancement of the human species, then, is solely driven by the victory of those subsections of the species<sup>15</sup> that rise above the others. The race that excels beyond others in survivability – which entails advancing to “higher” forms of existence through culture – is the superior one. How “fittest” is measured can vary, focusing on intelligence, physical attributes, capacity as “the founders of culture, the bearers of culture, [or] the destroyers of culture” (Hitler 1999 [1927]: 290), creativity, “consciousness”, or a mixture of these and other attributes. In a sense, the struggle is never-ending with no “end of History” afterward, which would appear to deviate from the discussion of vanguardism in Chapter 2. However, as the epistemologically-privileged race not only understands this historical dynamic, but also sees how to purify and strengthen the race, the creation of a “new man” – the perfected racial type – and a new era of humanity inconceivable in the present is not only possible, but imperative to create, or as Hitler describes it, “the pacifistic-humane idea is perfectly all right perhaps when the highest type of man has previously conquered and subjected the world to an extent that makes him the sole ruler of this earth” (Hitler 1999 [1927]: 288).

One can see some overlaps in this view of struggle and the *corso ricorso* notion found among nation-vanguards, but much of this similarity is driven by the ambiguity of “struggle” as a term. This ambiguity is especially evident in German, and creates issues in determining which uses of “struggle” (*Kampf*) indicate a Darwinist sense of struggle versus *Realpolitik* or Nietzschean notion of struggle (Aschheim 1992: 123–125, Kelly 1981: 30–31, 109). As with other vanguard groups, the use of pseudo-Hegelian historical formations and concepts in their ideological “infrastructure” provides some basis for this similarity between them; however, the differences between racial and national vanguards must be kept clear. Other scholars have noted the Darwinian origins of the racist notion of history (Weikart 2004; Weindling 1989: 24–48), but the development of these ideas within race-vanguardism is more complicated. As with other forms of vanguardism, Hegelianism provides the basic ideological “infrastructure” for these groups, with race-vanguardism combining Hegelian structures with Darwinian

(and other evolutionary) systems. Although their terminology is often some variant on Darwinian categories and biological phrases, their notion of History still places them squarely in the tradition of Hegel, particularly in the *Lebensphilosophie* interpretations of this system (Aschheim 1992: 160–163). In other words, class-vanguards put an economic twist on Hegel, nation-vanguards put a country-based twist on Hegel, while race-vanguards place a biological twist on Hegel. While the substance is different, thus leading to different conclusions, the overall ideational structure remains remarkably similar.

As with Hegel's system, the interpretations of Darwin's system are based upon the perception/interpretation of Darwin, but not necessarily what he actually wrote or believed; race-vanguards selectively interpret these other systems as they "fit" into their own. The challenge presented by the vanguards of race is the number of different sources they so interpret; thus a race-vanguard group has at its base a Hegelian structure of History, with the "engine" of history deriving from an interpretation of Darwin, and the vanguard's position based on racial consciousness formed through "will" (often based on Nietzschean motifs, among others). Internal to the system, this mosaic of sources comes together into a coherent whole, while external to it, this mishmash of philosophies and methods is muddled at best.<sup>16</sup> An example of this evolutionary terminology comes from William L. Pierce – chairman of the National Alliance race-vanguard group (Griffin 2001: 116–132) – when he writes:

We can only speak of higher and lower grades of evolution if we pick a particular characteristic and a direction of change of that characteristic which we define as 'upward'. The characteristic which we will always have in mind for this purpose is consciousness, and the direction of change is that of the Cosmos as a whole, namely, toward more and more fully developed states of consciousness.

(Pierce 2012: 24)

Darwinian "survival of the fittest" is translated into a universal dynamic, which has a certain and specific direction. This direction, however, is less positive for race-vanguards than for other vanguardist types.

A unique feature of the race-vanguard view of History (compared to class or nation types) is the possibility of failure; the class and nation versions generally envision an inevitable victory (either in the near future or in one of the various "cycles" of History), while the race version also clearly envisions a possible defeat. This pessimism is notable within race-vanguardist ideology:

In this long-range type of competition, whole species may gradually disappear without any of its individuals being aware that this is taking place. They may live out their allotted life-spans and leave progeny (only not as many statistically as the better-adapted). In this form, the 'elimination of

the unfit' is quite painless. In the long run, it is lethal competition, 'genetic death,' nevertheless.

(Jones 1981: 241)

While class-vanguards have a generally linear view of historical dynamics leading to inevitable victory, and nation-vanguards see the cycles of *corso ricorso* in History leading to a new golden age for the nation, the race-vanguard view of History-as-struggle opens the possibility of either a positive or negative end to History – either a new species dominant over Nature, or a decayed species doomed to extinction. This perspective originates within the materialist basis of the mass population itself, as the “substance” that creates the epistemologically-privileged race is necessarily finite. If the epistemologically-privileged race does not move to increase its survivability – both against other races and against Nature itself – then racial decay will lead to humanity’s collapse. Although nation-vanguards also fear the role of decadence in the mass population, the cultural and idealist aspects of the nation allow room for a later “resurgence” of the population; race-vanguards do not share this optimism. If the race decays – especially through the “mixing of blood” and interbreeding – there is no means of reversing this process, with the view that the end of the superior race will decrease the survivability of humanity overall (Goldensohn 2004: 99). Himmler put this idea bluntly in stating “We shall take care that never again in Germany, the heart of Europe, will the Jewish-Bolshevistic revolution of sub-humans be kindled either from within or through emissaries from without” (quoted in Manvell and Fraenkel 1965: 49). The race-vanguard view of History differs from the previous two, in other words, by accepting the real possibility that not only could victory be delayed, but that the dynamic of History could lead to the eventual destruction of humanity itself.<sup>17</sup>

The means of avoiding utter annihilation, both for race and humanity, is through guiding the superior race toward higher levels of evolution and cultural advancement. For this purpose, racial eugenics becomes the “science” of race-vanguards.

### ***Science: Racial Biology/Eugenics***

The science of race-vanguards is racial eugenics, the “making of a better race”.<sup>18</sup> Extending from a form of Darwinian logic, race-vanguards believe the epistemologically-privileged race is capable of understanding the dynamic of struggle, and can thus use this knowledge to “shape” and “direct” evolution of the race to a higher level. The will to advance, deriving more significantly from Nietzsche, is also a central part of this advancement, but knowledge of how to advance is equally important. In the words of Gerhard Wagner (a Nazi physician):

We want to rescue a dying people from the edge of the abyss and bring it back to the paths that will lead, according to human reason, to a future in

the coming millennium. ... We must therefore contend with three issues: the decline in the birthrate, the increase in sick and unfit genes in our people, and the mixing of the blood of our people with that of foreign and unrelated peoples, in particular with Jewish blood.

(Wagner 2008 [1936]: 69; but cf. Koonz 2003: 187–188)

The race-vanguard science of eugenics generally focuses on four points. First, eugenics (in its connection with population policies: Quine 1995) emphasizes the need for increasing the quantity of the population, seeking a means of increasing birthrates. But quantitative increases are not enough: the second key concern of vanguard eugenics is improving the quality of the race by “breeding” a superior form of the race itself. This qualitative change involves biological investigations in “stronger” genes and a means of ensuring they pass to the general race, as well as more social scientific (or even humanistic) analysis to train these “new men” of the race in behaviors and attitudes conducive to racial survival and dominance. Both of these previous points are “internal” to the race, fixated on taking the “best” of the racial stock that already exists in the epistemologically-privileged mass population. The third aspect of race-vanguard eugenic science, however, is focused “externally” toward other races. If the “internal” points aim to enhance and strengthen the “superior” race, the “external” concerns focus on extermination, more similar to an oncologist’s aim to destroy a cancer. The first external concern is to find means of identifying, quarantining, and eliminating “interbreeding” between the epistemologically-privileged race and “lesser” races. While the overall perspective of race-vanguardism demands strict racial separation, this “scientific” aspect of it instead attempts to ascertain how to identify cases of “miscegenation” to “weed out” apparent members of the world-historic race from the full population. Extending from this focus is the final main emphasis of racial eugenics: the removal of “foreign” blood. Beyond the identification of such other races, this area of focus is a reversal of the first “internal” emphasis; just as race-vanguard science seeks means to increase the quantity of the epistemologically-privileged race, so too it seeks “scientific” means of decreasing the quantity of other races, especially the Enemy race.

Going again to the Hegelianism of the “biology” used by racial vanguards, their notion of biology mixes both biologicistic arguments with historical, anthropological, and literary elements, although usually with a strong (biological) materialist foundation.<sup>19</sup> In other words, “biology” is not a narrowly focused science as generally understood, but rather “biology” is a totalistic category that influences (and is understood through) legends, myths, institutions, languages, economics, and all else; as survivability is linked with “culture”, both “natural scientific” and humanistic measures are used. This science has two aspects: the biological, and the “philosophy of life” (or *Lebensphilosophie*). The two did have connections, visible in the advocacy of eugenics along *Lebensphilosophie* lines, for instance, by German feminism (Aschheim 1992: 92–93). Other groups would go much farther (on

the Nazi view of Nietzsche, as reflected in the works of Alfred Bäumler, see Aschheim 1992: 234ff). It is in this mixture that one finds the often incongruous combinations of rationalistic modernism (on the technological level) and irrationalistic romanticism (Herf 1984b). For race-vanguards (epitomized in the theories of the Nazis), technological and scientific advancement was beneficial (especially in the area of biology), but the rationalistic forms should not overtake the focus on nature. More to the point, race-vanguards have been able to merge Darwinian biological “struggle” with broader cultural characteristics within a determinative historical dynamic through integration of Ludwig Klages’ language of *Lebensphilosophie* (Lebovic 2013). Following Klages (with obvious similarities to Spengler’s *Kultur/ Zivilisation* distinction: see Herf 1984a), a distinction between *Geist* (mind) and *Seele* (soul) often is maintained:

*Geist* on the one hand represented all those forces of modern, industrial, and intellectual rationalization which destroyed nature, peace, organicism, and the cosmic dimension. *Seele* on the other hand represented the possibility of an authentically lived life – the overcoming of alienated intellectuality in favor of a newfound earthy rootedness.

(Aschheim 1992: 80–81; see also Klages 2013: 86–98)

The “science” of race, therefore, is not purely technical nor is it purely romantic, but instead is a mixture of both in the eyes of race-vanguard groups.

This merging of biology and life-philosophy often uses the language of Nietzsche<sup>20</sup> to express itself, both to extol the role of will in moving with the dynamics of history, but also to curse the evils of the weak, the mediocre, and the ugly.<sup>21</sup> As Traian Herseni (of the Romanian Iron Cross) put it regarding “dysgenic people”, “The sterilisation of certain categories of men is to be envisaged, not in a stupid manner, as a violation of human dignity, but as a tribute to beauty, to morality, and in general to perfection” (quoted in Ioanid 2005: 135). A strong motivation in the science of racial purification could be summed up as the hatred of “the power of the average” and “mediocrity” (Sternhell 1994: 126), which praises the strengthening of *will* to overcome “decayed” forms of morality; the dangers of the mediocre – be they “inferior” races or sub-optimal members of the “superior” race – are not only in their genetic weaknesses, but also in their moral turpitude and inability to do what “must” be done. A concept like “mercy”, therefore, becomes offensive to empirical science and social needs. If the dynamic of History is struggle, and the science of advancement is strengthening the race, then mercy toward the weak is a deeply flawed belief: the weak (be it an inferior race or some type of dysfunctional member of the epistemologically-privileged race) will only inhibit the survivability of the race itself, risking both the adaptive traits of the higher race and the general development of humanity itself. “Mercy”, in this view, is completely alien to the natural environment, an illustration of the weakness of will, and is a highly dysfunctional concept in social environments.



As with other vanguards, the knowledge of race eugenics is not enough to advance the epistemologically-privileged race. With the particular emphasis on will-to-power for the struggle (DeSilva 2012: 175; Lane 2008: 34; Rosenberg 1970: 98; Rosenberg 2011 [1937]: 421; Goering 2002 [1934]: 139–140; Hitler 2003: 33–36; Hitler 1999 [1927]: 454–457; also see Simi and Futrell 2010: 17), providing the motivational and practical aspect in a manner similar to class-focused *praxis*, direction is needed. As Frank L. DeSilva, a member of “The Order”, posits, “There will be no positive affirmation of the ‘science of race’ until, and when we, as a viable *political* programme within our folk-community, have gained social and political acceptance” (DeSilva 2012: 24). The vanguard of the race serves as the combination of will and knowledge needed to advance toward the New Man of the race. This directive element is needed, not only in the struggle against other races, but also because of the totalistic form the struggle takes with nature itself.

### ***Totalism: “Nature”***

The struggle of the epistemologically-privileged race is not merely a social conflict, but instead is a foundational aspect of biological existence. For race-vanguards, Nature itself is fundamentally a matter of striving for survival; the struggle against other races is merely the height of the conflict that rages between humanity and the natural world itself. The Darwinian dynamic of survival saturates all aspects of life, with the racial unit as the key measure for success or failure among human beings. Society itself is shaped by this totalistic view of Nature in two ways. First, the creation of human communities and their continued maintenance requires an ongoing fight with Nature for the needed space and resources for thriving. Second, the manner in which races adapt to these conditions – and the cultural level to which they rise to meet the challenge – shapes the means by which these races can, or cannot, advance. Some races merely survive but do not thrive, others (specifically, the epistemologically-privileged population) advance toward higher forms of racial existence, while still others (the Enemy race in particular) survive through parasitic attachment to the successes and cultures of “superior” races.

Race-vanguards view “biology” to be all-encompassing; the only aspect outside of race is (natural) environment, although even here, many racial vanguards view the natural environment as shaping race in important ways. Outside of natural environment, however, no other factor is more important than race itself, in two main ways. First, racial vanguard organizations believe that race determines a person “all the way down” – one’s capabilities, natural abilities, sociability, and all else is highly determined by racial characteristics. Second, races by their nature are in competition to one level or another; like different species vying for the same scarce resources from nature, so too are races perpetually locked in a struggle for survival, a struggle from which no race (or member of a race) can opt out. Because of this universal expansion – and diverging from nation-vanguards – the epistemologically-privileged race must expand globally. For instance, “For Pierce’s

organization [the National Alliance], not even a racially homogeneous America would be enough. Instead, it sees the world as dominated by a ‘Jew World Order’, and advocates an ‘Aryan World Order’ in its place” [emphasis in original] (Durham 2005: 169). The competition between races – and the more fundamental struggle between the epistemologically-privileged race and the natural environment itself – knows no boundaries.

While the dynamics of biological History demand struggle for supremacy, opposing races are not equal threats in the eyes of racial vanguards. As with class-vanguards, the threats from various opposing collectivities are overshadowed by the main Enemy: for race-vanguards, the Enemy is a uniquely devastating and omnipresent “parasite” race.

### ***Enemy: “Parasite” Race***

There are no shortage of opponents for race-vanguards, such as competitor races and inferior races. However, there is only one Enemy group: the “parasite” race. Specifically, this Enemy race is parasitic and cancer-like in nature; incapable of higher survivability on its own (through biological fitness and cultural advancement), the Enemy race instead latches onto “superior” races, gaining dominance over others through deceit and subterfuge. Just as the supremacy of the epistemologically-privileged race is viewed as helping all humanity, so too is the extermination of the Enemy race viewed as helping humanity universally; as Goebbels notes in a 14 February 1942 diary entry,

The Fuehrer once more expressed his determination to clean up the Jews in Europe pitilessly. There must be no squeamish sentimentalism about it. The Jews have deserved the catastrophe that has now overtaken them. Their destruction will go hand in hand with the destruction of our enemies. We must hasten this process with cold ruthlessness. We shall thereby render an inestimable service to a humanity tormented for thousands of years by the Jews.

*(Goebbels 1970 [1948]: 86; also see Rosenberg 1970: 175–190)*

As with other vanguard groups, the Enemy category is paradoxical. On the one hand, this Enemy is inherently weak, conniving, and blind to the dynamics of History, but on the other hand, the Enemy is also omnipresent, capable of undermining the epistemologically-privileged category at every turn, and has access to an almost limitless reserve of wealth and power to secure its own misbegotten aims. This paradox is highly visible with race-vanguards, insofar as the central racial Enemy is biologically inferior to the epistemologically-privileged race and, to an extent, even to the “inferior”/“slave” races, and yet also has a level of omnipotence similar to the Manichaean “Dark Principle” or “evil god” (Stoyanov 2000: 86–96). As the race-vanguardist view of History differs in some significant

ways from the linear or cyclical forms of class- and nation-focused groups, the manner of the Enemy race's ascension requires additional discussion.

There tend to be two main arguments for the Enemy race's elevated position as the dominant and malignant force in human affairs.<sup>22</sup> The first main factor is the inaction and indifference of the superior race in earlier periods, allowing the inferior races to grow, entangle, and degrade their superiors.<sup>23</sup> Thus the epistemologically-privileged race is like a lazy gardener who, having left his garden to its own devices for too long, must take up his hoe and begin weeding.<sup>24</sup> The second factor specifically addressed the "parasitic" nature of the Enemy race; in Hitler's view of "the Jew", "He himself is no element of organization, but a ferment of decomposition" (Hitler 1999 [1927]: 655). Based upon the dynamic of History held by race-vanguards, the evolutionary "track" of the Enemy race is one of parasitic adaptability, which results in an incapacity to form any type of higher culture while also permitting the Enemy to infiltrate and thrive in nearly any community. The Enemy race thus has the characteristics of a parasite and a virus: the Enemy is essentially dependent upon others for its existence and perpetuation in the fashion of a lamprey, but also operates in a hidden and gradual manner, imperceptibly sapping the health of the host long before the victim is aware of what is happening, like a type of influenza. In this view, the Enemy race has not circumvented the dynamic of natural struggle, but it also is not capable of evolving into a self-sufficient racial unit; rather, its evolutionary "niche" is purely opportunistic and dependent upon the advancements of others.

A key characteristic of the Enemy race is its perceived hypocrisy; race-vanguards usually view the Enemy race as being deeply race-conscious (in the sense of defending its own race) while simultaneously acting to undermine race-consciousness in other groups, especially the epistemologically-privileged race. Advocating political and social theories based upon the equality of races, as well as scientific theories postulating the irrelevance of race as a fundamentally distinguishing trait between human beings, the Enemy race attempts – through its use and control of governmental institutions as well as media resources – to lessen and remove the "true" understanding of race as a means of advancing its own race toward domination. While race-vanguards focused on the biological aspect of "degeneracy" emphasize the materialist aspect of interbreeding, the Enemy race's policy of racial egalitarian "propaganda" provides the cultural angle of "decadence". This policy gives the parasitic race its contemporary strength, insofar as it is the one group that is acting "correctly" in a partial sense (by working toward the benefit of the race) while undercutting this necessary mentality among the epistemologically-privileged race. It is this (false) racial egalitarianism that race-vanguards often denounce as "cosmopolitanism"; while race-vanguards themselves support a type of cosmopolitanism based on race, they ardently oppose a cosmopolitanism based on racial equality and/or irrelevance, and see such a view as evidence of the machinations of the Enemy race's policy of assuring its power.

As such, other opponent groups are often viewed as the “tools” of the Enemy race, such as in the hatred of the bourgeoisie. In the words of P. P. Panaitescu (of the Iron Cross of Romania), “The so-called democratic states are based in fact on a terrible dictatorship of the plutocrats, or a rich stratum of the bourgeoisie living at the expense of the other classes” (quoted in Ioanid 2005: 147). The connection between bourgeoisie and the Enemy race is evident in how some Iron Cross thinkers believed “one of the essential problems of Romania derived from the non-Romanian origin of the middle class” (Ioanid 2005: 148).

Of particular note in this context of Enemy races is the population of Jews.<sup>25</sup> This unfortunate group is the fixation of numerous racial vanguards, regardless of the “superior” race upon which they are based. Why these racial vanguard organizations across the spectrum have such deep-seated hatred for Jews is peculiar (Herf 2006). Some of the reasons may be historical anti-Semitism that metastasizes into a racialized form. Another factor may be the central role of Jews-as-Enemy in many early racialist theories. The uniformity of this hatred is as startling as it is consistent, and is made all the more disconcerting when these groups arise in the post-Holocaust era.

One must be careful to distinguish the Enemy race from other “opponent” races, which include racial “inferiors” and racial “competitors”. In their rhetoric, some race-vanguards do not make such a distinction clear. For instance, Matthew Hale (of the World Church of the Creator) states: “We submit that the other races are biological rivals, they are biological enemies. ... But the other races are capable of dispossessing us of our territories, of our lives, and therefore they are our natural enemies” (Swain and Nieli 2003: 241). For most race-vanguards, however, a distinction does exist between the Enemy race and other races. Competitor races can, at times, even be allies, while inferior races are at best potential slaves, and at worst the tools of the Enemy race. As inferior races are more a concern for race-vanguards than competitors, we will deal with the competitor populations briefly. Competitors are racial groups that may be closer to equality with the epistemologically-privileged race (perhaps partially degenerated, but potentially salvageable), also seeking to use limited resources, but also exhibiting traits showing racial strength. Because of their place in the racial hierarchy, these competitors are not an Enemy like the “parasite” race, but instead may be comparatively peaceful contenders or even temporary allies; however, race-vanguards generally envision conflict with other races (even comparatively “higher” ones) as eventually being a necessity. To give the Nazi example: Hitler’s ambiguous feelings regarding Great Britain were largely based on the notion of the Anglos as such a competitor race (or perhaps subsection of the white race), insofar as the British illustrated “superiority” in their expansion while also presenting a clear danger to Germany (see Weikart 2009: 83, 161). The Japanese, as a “culture-bearing” race, were elevated enough in the Nazi view to permit an alliance, even if warfare with them (as an elevated but still inferior race) was necessary later on (Kershaw 2000: 504). Such competitors will likely still need to be defeated, but such a conflict

would likely be viewed in a more romantic fashion – two great races fighting each other like Hector and Achilles – rather than as a hygienic procedure to exterminate “parasites”.

More prominent as an opponent are purely “inferior” races. Unlike the Enemy race, which is a danger because of its subterfuge and cunning, the danger from “inferior” races is potential infiltration, either biologically through interbreeding or culturally as the tools of the Enemy race. Through interbreeding – both in the blunt biological sense as well as in the mixing of racial “cultures” – “inferior” races can sap the vitality, adaptability, and survivability of the epistemologically-privileged race. Especially as this process can be gradual over multiple generations, race-vanguards see “lesser” races as an insidious threat to their own race, often ignored until it is too late. Thus, a race viewed as weak and incompetent in itself – a race of “natural” slaves – presents a challenge in its very existence should it have the ability to “infect” the racial purity of the epistemologically-privileged racial mass. Some racial “inferiors” may be useful, and such a racial opponent should not be eliminated completely but instead used for the benefit of the epistemologically-privileged race: the Nazi plan for resettling Slav populations to work for the Reich provides an example (Burleigh 2000: 440–441). In this sense, the continued existence of these “lesser” races is a matter of practical evaluation on the part of the epistemologically-privileged race, while the extermination of the Enemy race is a point of principle. The other main danger of “inferior” races is their susceptibility to being used as “shock troops” by the Enemy race. For reasons of small population, lack of organization, and subterfuge, the Enemy race (in this view) does not act directly, but instead “uses” the lesser races to advance its aims; in this sense, the racial egalitarian doctrines become useful as they provide a (false) sense of esteem in the lesser race, while also creating an ideological framework by which to “fool” the inferior race to mobilize for policies desired by the Enemy race.<sup>26</sup> As a matter of practical evaluation, race-vanguards consider the amount of Enemy “infiltration” in determining whether a lesser race need only be “pushed out” of a territory (and, being left to its own devices, becomes less of a threat) or requires a more extreme response.

In counteracting the Enemy race, while also circumventing the longer-term threats presented by interbreeding as well as racial competitors, guidance is needed. Moreover, the guiding force must not only have knowledge of the dynamics of racial struggle, but must also have the will to accomplish its goals. Beyond just a group, race-vanguards view the importance of the Leader – a type of “poet-genius” acting as the embodiment of the racial movement – is needed. It is to that organizational form to which we turn.

### ***Vanguard Party: Variant on Leadership Principle***

In a way, race-vanguard parties take the vanguardism concept to its logical conclusion, where the “advanced cadre” of the epistemologically-privileged population

must also itself have more “advanced” members, culminating in the supremacy of one member, embodying the racial movement itself: the Leader. Although, as with nation-vanguards, the key focus of analysis is often on the leader and the *Führerprinzip* upon which his position is based, the vanguard organization itself does not cease to be important. As with other types, the race-vanguard derives its power and legitimacy from the epistemologically-privileged population, while also circumventing and overcoming the inertia of the mass itself:

If in a people a certain amount of the highest energy and active force seems concentrated upon one goal and hence is definitively removed from the inertia of the broad masses, this small percentage has risen to be master over the entire number. World history is made by minorities when this minority of number embodies the majority of will and determination.

*[emphasis removed]* (Hitler 1999 [1927]: 399; also see 241–250)

Social revolution and action comes from the race itself, but must be directed by those within the race who have both the knowledge of the dynamic of racial struggle as well as the will to achieve their aims. This emphasis on will is particularly important, as “Understanding in its passive form corresponds to the majority of mankind which is lazy and cowardly. Membership [in the movement] requires an activistic frame of mind and thus corresponds only to the minority of men” *[emphasis removed]* (Hitler 1999 [1927]: 581). Also typical of vanguard parties, the race-vanguard views itself as necessarily acting in a manner that the world-historic mass population cannot, at least until properly guided by the advanced section of the race:

It is important to work with the masses, to inform them, to influence them, to recruit from among them; but they are not to be counted on for determinative, spontaneous support until after a small minority has already, by its own efforts, built a stronger force than that of any opposing faction.

*(Pierce 2012: 331; compare Lenin 1970 [1920]: 352)*

While all vanguard groups work toward the creation of some type of “New Man”, race-vanguards entwine the “New Man” and the vanguard party itself much more closely. For the racial vanguard, the creation of the elite is still a work in progress – indeed, one of the major reasons for the seizing of political power is to ensure that the creation of the New Man can be intensified. A good example of this practice is the case of the SS, as the elite extension of the Party moving toward a higher form of social organization: “Himmler prepared his men to carry out a comprehensive racial protection (*Rassenschutz*) program that required study, discipline, and spiritual devotion” (Koonz 2003: 226–227; also see Höhne 1969: 146ff). Much more than most class- and nation-vanguards (with some exceptions: see Rosenthal 2002: 189–202), race-vanguards are much more engaged in actively

transforming the epistemologically-privileged category into its “true” form as interconnected with the success of the vanguard organization itself, for instance that “the SS should constitute the vanguard of a National Socialist army” (Stein 1966: 17). For those involved in the concentration camps and the like, such as the SS *Totenkopfstandarten* (Death’s Head regiments), ideological indoctrination into a self-perception as the developing New Man was viewed as vital (Sydnor 1977: 26–31).

The racial vanguard, therefore, strives “to bring about the *Volksgemeinschaft*, the true harmony of classes” (Welch 2004: 214) through its guidance of the epistemologically-privileged race: full unity based on the “true” foundation of the racial unit. However, the organizational style of race-vanguards once in power is unique, as it attempts to combine both rigid discipline and a type of competitive bureaucracy within the state itself, as well as in the integration of state and party.<sup>27</sup> During the existence of the Nazi regime, scholars noted how “regulatory bodies operate under statutory provisions which are usually so vague that they are only general enabling devices” (Fraenkel 2010 [1941]: 69), which permitted the rise of a cacophony of agencies and party leaders presenting orders, even if lacking authority (Neumann 2009 [1944]: 50–51) and led to notable infighting both between agencies and especially between Hitler’s lieutenants (Speer 1970: 87–88). Even in areas central for totalitarian control – the centralization of police forces as well as party auxiliaries – the disputes between Wilhelm Frick, Heinrich Himmler, and Hermann Goering (among others) were constant (Browder 1990: 76–80; Westermann 2005: 140). As Peukert notes, “Each of these groups (party administration, SS and police, business, armed forces) had its vassals and a relatively secure power base, but each tended to interfere with the areas of responsibility of others” (Peukert: 1987: 43). Some of this organizational chaos may be a quirk of the specific context surrounding the Nazi rise to power in Germany (Orlow 1965). However, this type of internal competition also fits within the broader dynamic of struggle for race-vanguards generally, insofar as the skirmishes between these individuals will “weed out” the weaker and leave the strong in command. However, for this system to operate (both in the party and within a regime), a central force – a will above wills – must serve to bring order and discipline: a Leader.

At the apex of the race-vanguard elite is the Leader, viewed as a type of “poet-genius” who channels, directs, and (in a sense) embodies the final aims and desires of the whole race: “The idea was that the leader was a kind of vessel that contained and incarnated the soul of a people, articulating its will” (Schivelbusch 2006: 52). Grasping not only the science of race, but also exhibiting a racial consciousness that expresses itself in sheer will, the Leader is viewed as the “painter” who, through creative action, moves the epistemologically-privileged race (both directly and through the racial elite in the vanguard party) toward its world-historic destiny. The race-vanguard leader meshes characteristics of the other vanguard types discussed thus far: the race-vanguard Leader uses the rigor of

racial “science” to form the New Man and higher society (like the head of a class-vanguard group with economic “science”), while also rousing the blood and “spirit” of the race to accentuate its higher culture against lesser groups (extolling the “myth” in a manner similar to nation-vanguards). This combination of characteristics creates a view of the Leader in race-vanguards that emphasizes – indeed, exaggerates – the importance of leaders in general (and the Leader in particular) for success of the race: the fixation on the Leader within the vanguard party itself generates the *Führerprinzip* that penetrates all levels of the party (and, it is expected, society in general).<sup>28</sup>

While one could examine *Führerprinzip* under the broader conceptualization of charisma and compare with other vanguards (Schweitzer 1974; see also Reed 2012; Tucker 1968), the specific differences of the race-vanguard itself are more important. It is true that nation- and race-vanguardism share a similar organizational structure based on the leadership principle, but there are marked differences in rationale and structure between these two types. Both do have some notion of the leader being attuned to the “myth” of the nation or race; however, for the racial vanguardists, there is a much stronger biological substratum to this idea. Although the leader in this view need not be a biological scientist (in the ordinary language sense) or even be the most biologically “pure” racial specimen (though one suspects that would help), the expectation is that s/he will “know” or “feel” the “pulse” of the race better than all others, and thus be able to direct it toward greater survivability. It is this “feeling” in the “blood” that connects the racial vanguardist leader to the epistemologically-privileged race, and also provides the leader with the means to communicate with population in the depths of its “racial soul”. Rather than using an “instrumentalist” form of reason, the leader attempts to touch the emotive and primal. Hitler’s use of speeches and spectacle provide a strong example. Other racial-vanguards have used literature. In discussing his novels *The Turner Diaries* and *Hunter*, Pierce states “I was trying to reach people who were basically racially conscious, but simply hadn’t really put it together, didn’t have a coherent way of thinking yet, hadn’t figured out the answers to a lot of things” (quoted in Swain and Nieli 2003: 264). The means may vary, but the racial leader’s “resonance” with the “racial soul” of the epistemologically-privileged race strongly comprises the use of the non-rational to connect to the primal.

## Conclusion

While abhorrent, racial vanguard organizations share a disturbing level of similarity with other forms of vanguardism. As will be discussed in greater detail in the conclusion of this text, this is also an issue of concern given the amount of cross-over between vanguard groups’ members; as such, what appears to be the bizarre fixation of some disaffected and weak individuals may quickly, and dangerously, spiral into something much larger, with much greater destructive capability.



Ideas similar to those found among race-vanguards can be seen in surprising areas (although it is not clear whether there is any direct influence or if this is instead an “affinity” of similar ideas shaped in similar circumstances),<sup>29</sup> particularly among the next form of vanguardism to be examined here, the vanguard of “the oppressed” (or “subalterns”). In their disdain for “logocentrism”, their fixation on the redemptory or liberatory nature of violence, and shared hatred of some Enemy groups (especially Jews or “Zionists”), various subaltern-vanguards show remarkable overlaps with groups such as the Order. Although sharing many organizational similarities and envisioned structural opponents, race-vanguards for the most part are not welcomed among subaltern-vanguards. Some subaltern vanguard groups have a strong racist element within them, but the notion of History (a derivative form of class-vanguardism) usually results in viewing race as cultural “construction” rather than biological “reality” – and in practice, making them more similar to nation-vanguards. As a matter of comparison, the similar focus on anti-imperialism by “proletarian” nations against “plutocratic” ones – now shifted to the language of “center” versus “periphery” or “global North” versus “global South” – as well as similar language on the importance of vitalistic or experiential “knowledge” shows strong resonances between nation-vanguards and subaltern-vanguards.

Finding connections between subaltern-vanguards and those based on nation or race does present numerous challenges, the most severe originating within the nature of subaltern-vanguardism itself. Of all the vanguard systems analyzed in this work, the vanguard of the “oppressed” is the most derivative, chaotic, and internally tumultuous of all. It is to the cacophony of subaltern-vanguardism that we now turn.

## Notes

- 1 As with the other vanguard groups discussed, other interpretations of their ideologies are certainly possible; for an interesting reconstruction of Nazi ideology, see Lane 1974.
- 2 As mentioned in Chapter 5, the Falangists can be viewed as a vanguardist at times, but are a problematic case.
- 3 One must add qualifications in this case, in that the KKK’s organizational and ideological structure varies significantly over time, making placement of it as a vanguard group (racial, national, or otherwise) problematic at points. See George and Wilcox 1996: 362–381; Chalmers 1987.
- 4 For Hitler’s distinction between the SA versus usual militia organization, see Hitler 1999 [1927]: 546–548.
- 5 Entanglements of this type are not, however, unique. Similar difficulties in separating class-vanguards and nation-vanguards from subaltern-vanguards will be addressed in Chapter 7.
- 6 North Korea is a key example of this difficulty. While its current ideology and propaganda appears to emphasize a racist form of legitimation, summed up with Koreans as the “cleanest” or “purest” race (Myers 2011), the situation is ambiguous, insofar as “Korea-as-nation” and “Korea-as-race” appear to overlap almost perfectly. This may be an idiosyncrasy of its geography and history, one partially shared by traditional Japan: a

comparatively homogenous population isolated by natural barriers provides the context for equating race with nation. For most other areas, some heterogeneity disrupts this possibility: in Europe and the Asian subcontinent, the numerous linguistic/ethnic groups and governance bodies interacted with each other consistently, while in China proper, although there were times of (theoretical) political unity under various emperors, notable ethnic variety remained.

- 7 In the case of the Nazi party, at least some sources indicate that Hitler himself was less than enthused about such mysticism (Ryback 2008: 144–145); had Nazi Germany managed to survive the Second World War, it is an open question whether Hitler would have moved against the developing mysticism as he consolidated his position.
- 8 Consider the example of the Nazi *Auslands-Organisation* and its activities in the Far East (McKale 1977).
- 9 The differences exist between nation-vanguards, and also can change over time within a single nation-vanguard; an excellent example comes from the Italian Fascists, where initially Jews were not “foreign” (and indeed, members of the Fascist party in good standing), but later on become “foreign” in terms of population. (Ben-Ghiat 2001: 148–157).
- 10 Although often used interchangeably, eugenicists need not primarily be racialists, as the Italian case illustrates partially. The Italian Fascists included notable eugenicists who desired to eliminate the “criminal” elements in Italian society via eugenics policies; while still based on a notion of biological inferiority (of socially undesirable elements), it did not need at its basis a notion of racial hierarchy as well. Such a difference helps to explain the controversy in Italy among eugenicist Fascists with the publication of “The Manifesto of Race” (2000 [1938]) (see “Critique of The Manifesto of Race ...” 2000 [1941]).
- 11 One sees similar changes with Drieu La Rochelle: Soucy 1979: 186–188.
- 12 This can present issues of language. The collectivism of most race-vanguard groups is socialist in structure, but of a form different from class-based socialism: “Hitler always rejected any full or systematic socialism – an ‘unfortunate term,’ as he put it – since it contradicted the principles of spontaneity, antibureaucratism, familialism, and competition that formed the basis of the Nazi world view.” (Payne 1980: 88). Most vanguards believe in some form of socialism (as noted in Chapter 2), as long as one does not interpret socialism solely in a class-based and/or Marxist sense.
- 13 The Enemy race is more complicated, insofar as it also lacks the “culture-creating” capability but also has a nearly omnipresent ability to survive through destruction: a type of ultimate parasite. This will be discussed in greater detail below.
- 14 The main exceptions to this view being those “weak” members with congenital or hereditary diseases, which includes birth defects and hereditary illnesses to “social deviancy” and “criminality”. For individuals and races both, “If the power to fight for one’s own health is no longer present, the right to live in this world of struggle ends” [emphasis removed] (Hitler 1999 [1927]: 257). Generally, race-vanguards prefer a eugenic solution to these populations (ranging from sterilization to murder). This distinction is best exemplified in the focus on population policies within the race itself; various programs to remove or eliminate the “weak” (the prominent example being the Operation T4 “euthanasia” program in Nazi Germany (Pichot 2009: 193–206) primarily focused upon the superior race itself to “strengthen” it. However, these eugenic policies often were simply more extreme versions of policies already taking place in other, non-vanguardist contexts, such as the forced sterilization policies in the United States and others (see MacMaster 2001: 51–53).
- 15 For some thinkers, such as Haeckel, different races actually represented separate species (Pichot 2009: 250–257; Weikart 2004: 106–108)
- 16 Such muddles, of course, are not unique to race-vanguards. In the case of class-vanguards, a similar mishmash exists insofar as one has the mixture of Hegelian history,

economics from Ricardo, organizational inspiration from Auguste Blanqui (Blanqui 2004 [1850]), and others. While one could note various reasons as to why the muddle of class-vanguards is less noticed than that of race-vanguards, a major factor may simply be time: because of its longer duration, there has been more time for class-vanguards to provide arguments, or at least *post hoc* rationalizations, to explain this clutter. For an interesting recent view on interpreting “affinities” and “influences” on later movements, see Shorten 2012: 73–106.

- 17 One could illustrate this difference in perspectives on the dynamic/end of History in religious language: if class-vanguards believe in a Christian-like eschatology, and nation-vanguards in a classically pagan cyclical history, then race-vanguards believe in an open-ended dynamic that can conclude either in final victory of the “saints” or *Götterdämmerung* resulting in the death of any humanity worth existing.
- 18 Eugenics is usually discussed as a “pseudoscience”. This appellation is true, but needs qualification: it was a pseudoscience that had the support of some of the most influential scientific minds of the era, as well as gaining support across the political spectrum (Pichot 2009: 148–173; Adams, Allen, and Weiss 2005; Allen 1988). It should give us pause that the pseudoscience of today was considered the most progressive of the sciences in its time, as “evolutionary racist theories were scientific, representing modernity and progress” (Pichot 2009: 301, also see 133, 260). Given the increased interest in “liberal” or “positive” eugenics (Buchanan, Brock, Daniels, and Wikler 2000), one would hope that the example of earlier decades would generate greater humility in the application of scientific theories to social policy. Moreover, all the forms of “science” discussed in this work are pseudoscientific, whether originating from the vanguard of class, or nation, or others. Each has its own reasoning and rationales, but in the end, they are debates over illusions. All of them are as “scientific” as an extensive discussion of how many angels can dance on the head of a pin: brilliant analysis and wondrous logical derivations may result, but it is still focused on ephemera.
- 19 On the “scientific” measures used to classify Nordics, see Weiss 2010: 240–247.
- 20 On debate of Nietzsche’s relation to Nazism, see Warren 1985; Brinton 1940. For an example of a postmodern re-acquiring of Nietzsche, see Antonio 1995. This type of reinterpretation will be addressed in more detail in Chapter 7. For a critique of viewing overlaps between fascist and postmodern systems, see Woodley 2010: 1–19.
- 21 See, for instance, Nietzsche 2006: 74–76.
- 22 See Eckhart 1925 for an example of this view.
- 23 The assistance (intentional or otherwise) of “race traitors” also becomes a factor in this indifference. For a recent work attempting to resurrect “race traitor” as a useful concept – in this case, for the subaltern-focused Critical Race Theory, see Preston and Chadderton 2012. See also Aleinikoff 1991.
- 24 My thanks to Justin P. Gray for this metaphor. See also Bauman 2001.
- 25 Here one must distinguish between anti-Semitism and racism in general:

Aryanism – and still more so, anti-Semitism – remained above all characteristic of ideologically and politically motivated individuals and movements, whereas biological racism, which considered people of color as biologically inferior, was universally accepted and supported by science, with a few exceptions”.

(Pichot 2009: 312)

The Nazis, and those like them, merged these two streams together.

- 26 For instance, among American white supremacists, a frequent trope is that the “lesser” race of African-Americans are being used as tools by the Enemy race of Jews (Macdonald 1980).
- 27 For an analysis of the uneven, and at points contradictory, means the Nazi regime used to integrate Party and State, see Noakes 2004. See also Hitler 1999 [1927]: 471–477.

- 28 To again turn to religious language, the leader in class-vanguardism and nation-vanguardism (despite their differences) would generally be equivalent to someone like a Moses: the messenger of the “true” moving force (the class or nation). For race-vanguards, on the other hand, the Leader is closer to Jesus Christ: a “messenger” who at the same time *is* the message.
- 29 For an excellent analysis of “affinities” versus “influences”, see Shorten 2012: 87–106. Also see Gray 2014: 525–526; 535–538.

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# 7

## THE SUBALTERN TRANSITION

If the party does not make the people aware of the tools and methods of liberation, there will be no means by which the people can mobilize.

*Huey P. Newton (2009[1967]: 15)*

In the period following the Second World War, another form of vanguardist ideology and organization, or rather derivations from previous versions, formed. While often using Marxian terminology, and finding guidance and inspiration from class-vanguard writers and practitioners (especially Gramsci, Fanon, the early Lenin, Mao, and Ho, among others), the epistemologically-privileged category changed notably. Moreover, these class-based elements also combined with concepts and ideas seen within nation-vanguardism. Rather than the working class or the nation solely or primarily, the focus switched to formerly colonized peoples, the poor more generally, racial minorities, and others. Rather than the proletariat, it was the oppressed – or “subalterns” – who became the focus.

The term “subaltern” itself requires some clarification.<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this study, “subaltern” means “population operating under systemic oppression by societal institutions, which can include (but not limited to) economics, politics, culture, family structure, language, and others”. “Oppression” can mean *de jure* or *de facto* constraints upon the subaltern population on participating in any or all of these institutions, such as legal bans from voting, linguistic forms that minimize the equality of these populations, and sundry other possibilities. Obviously, this definition is rather broad, but this breadth is necessary in understanding the syncretic nature of the subaltern transition. In Gramsci’s words,

The history of the subaltern classes is necessarily fragmented and episodic; in the activities of these classes there is a tendency toward unification, albeit

in provisional stages, but this is the least conspicuous aspect, and it manifests itself only when victory is secured.

*(Gramsci 1996: 21)*

With additional epistemologically-privileged populations, unified by a shared Enemy and a partially shared technical language, the notion of “oppression” cannot be limited only to economic or cultural aspects of society, but must continually expand. Rather than a necessarily “new” form of vanguardism, the middle of the twentieth century sees a transition from “pure” forms of vanguardism to instead an alliance formation of disparate groups aligned together through a shared notion of oppression as well as mutual agreement on the Enemy.

Although the utter destruction from the Second World War might lead one to predict the rise of new vanguardist groups (as followed the First World War and the Great Depression), two factors mitigated this rise in the West. First was greater suspicion of mass-based, radical political parties, as the examples of the Fascist and Nazi parties, as well as the persistent concerns regarding the Soviet Union, led to decreased zeal for such parties. The second factor was the division of Europe between the US and USSR spheres of influence; both major powers, be it through the Marshall Plan of the US in Western Europe or the setting up of “people’s democracies” in Central and Eastern Europe, shaped the infrastructure in their spheres to prevent dissident radicalisms from arising, or at least gaining popular strength. Linked to this change in historical context was the perspective of vanguardist-inclined individuals and groups toward the Soviet Union. Although there was some discomfort regarding the Terror Purge of 1936–1938 as well as the various instructions from Comintern in dealing with Fascism and Nazism, the Soviet Union still held pride of place as the spearhead for class-based vanguards as well as those often associated with such organizations (see Hollander 1998). Even the “excesses” of the Stalin era did not significantly dampen the ardor of these groups, excepting those class-vanguard groups (mostly of minor importance) that aligned with Lev Trotsky upon his expulsion from Russia. When the “secret speech” on Stalin’s crimes (Khrushchev 2007 [1956]) reached the West, class-vanguards were thrown into disarray. The admission of Soviet crimes under Stalin significantly undermined the legitimacy of the Soviet Communist Party on its own terms; that the active, advanced wing of the revolutionary class, possessing the “true” science of reality, would be led so astray and fall into such tyranny undermined the very structure upon which vanguard party authority is built.<sup>2</sup> While many vanguard groups would still look upon the Soviet Union as a potential ally and as having moved more in the “correct” direction than the West (and especially the United States), the internal imperative to follow the Soviets declined, but was never fully eliminated. Even after the Soviet Union’s collapse, various groups (including subaltern-vanguards) believed that “One of the dangers perceived in globalization is the predominance of a single way of thinking, which apparently emerged from the defeat of ‘real socialism’”

(della Porta and Diani 2006: 51). One result of this decline was the increased splintering of organizations, some staying aligned to the Soviet Union, others finding new class-vanguard states to follow (especially Mao's Communist Party and Ho's Vietminh), while others were attracted to newer groups and organizations that did not easily fit into the class-vanguard framework, at least initially: the caudillos of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization, or others. In other words, individuals increasingly inclined to the new order of subaltern vanguard groups.

While the aftermath of the Second World War quelled, for the most part, the expansion of vanguard parties in the West, a much different context arose with the accelerated tempo of anticolonial and national liberation movements following the war. With all the European colonial powers – victors and vanquished both – crippled by the conflict, a window of opportunity opened for colonized peoples to push them out. Many of the organizations in the anticolonial movements were heavily influenced by class-based vanguardist theories (particularly those of Lenin), but also recognized that the usual Marxist structure of History (and of the epistemologically-privileged population of the proletariat) simply could not operate in their own situations; thus one sees a special emphasis on the role of the peasantry (and of, in effect, “proletarian nations”, to use the language of nation-vanguards) in the broader world-historic conflict against capitalism, usually exemplified by the United States as well as colonial powers. This change helps explain the odd configurations among subaltern vanguardist groups, where an anti-imperialist vanguard may seek inspiration or alliances with groups that, at first glance, appear to be nation-vanguards (such as the PLO) or race-vanguards. This emphasis on new “revolutionary subjects” (or epistemologically-privileged populations) occurs both in the practical efforts as well as the treatises of political leaders (notable Mao, Ho, and Castro, although one could also include Nkrumah as another example: see Jordan 2015), but also among some of the most important theorists of this transitional period, Frantz Fanon being the most important. As these anticolonialist thinkers gained attention, this influence then extended back to the West; domestic vanguardist groups disillusioned with the Soviet Union could now turn to the national liberation movements – and their theorists – for language and guidance (as an example, see Newton 1973: 116–119). This historical configuration leads to two of the unique aspects of subaltern-vanguardism: its fundamental basis in alliances among the epistemologically-privileged category, and the central importance of the Enemy category (both discussed below). The result of these numerous factors was the rise of a new “style” of vanguardist thought and organization, rather than the fully distinct types of class, nation, and race discussed earlier. The Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA) provides a useful example: focused on social revolution, its members' ideology was formed in the cacophony of debates on radical theorists, both “traditional” (Marx, Lenin) and new (Mao, postcolonial thinkers), forming an “anti-imperialist” organization focused against the

United States, capitalism, “oppression”, and other issues that may or may not coherently adhere with each other (see Cumming 2010). It is to this “derivative” aspect of subaltern-vanguardism that we now turn.

## The Derivative Nature of the Subaltern Transition

Although there has been no shortage of theorizing associated with the entrance of new epistemologically-privileged populations (be it by vanguardist thinkers/actors or others), there is strikingly little that is substantively new. Instead, one sees an insertion of new types of population categories into a prefabricated system without significant revision. Those aspects that appear “new” often are visible in earlier vanguardist forms; this is particularly notable in the increased focus on “nation” and non-economic populations by the class-inspired “Left”, often echoing similar statements presented decades earlier by the nation-focused “Right”.<sup>3</sup> Certainly, the methods of analysis changed significantly, as different forms of analysis were used (psychoanalysis and linguistic analysis being major examples); but more often than not, these new methods were used to shore up theoretical difficulties in bringing in new epistemologically-privileged populations or to help explain why the previous world-historic groups (the proletariat especially) had “failed” in their Historical mission. In a sense, rather than questioning the idea of an epistemologically-privileged population and the other aspects of vanguardist ideational structures, the tendency instead was to question the reliability and/or definition of rationality itself. We can see this modification in the discussion of “the tension between *formal* rationality (the concern with technical means adapted to given ends) and *substantive* rationality (the qualification of formal rationality in accordance with prior considerations such as equality, justice, or aesthetic value)” (Woodley 2010: 21; also see the discussion on the Frankfurt School in Jay 1984: 261–263; Jay 1996 [1973]: 253–280). With these ambiguities in mind, “oppression” becomes the measure for actions in History during the subaltern transition, but the dynamics of History (and indeed, the very mechanisms of social revolution) continue to use a class-oriented vanguardist system without addressing internal contradictions. In this sense, it is rather like grafting a branch to a different plant in the hope of aiding the branch’s growth. The language, rhetoric, and tactics often remain the same – “raising consciousness”, the overthrow of capitalism, the creation of a new and non-exploitative society once the social revolution is complete – but with the class focus being secondary or, increasingly, shifted from a strict notion of “class” to more general notions of economic inequality.

Other vanguard types generally start from the precursors noted in Chapter 3, but branch out into specific notions based upon their epistemologically-privileged population. In the subaltern transition, on the other hand, there is not much of a “branching” at all: the Historical narrative remains basically the same (usually like the class-vanguard type, but with notable elements of nation-vanguardism as well), the key Enemy remains the same (primarily capitalism, either as the cause

of other oppressions or as a structure of domination symbiotically connected with other such structures), with the only difference being the Historical protagonist population. Where the more “pure” vanguard forms show significant variation based upon the epistemologically-privileged population, subaltern-vanguardism instead adds new categories of the “oppressed” to a previously developed, and minimally altered, vanguardist ideational system. In a sense, one could call the style of subaltern vanguardism class-vanguardism (of a Leninist or Maoist type) without the primacy of the proletariat. While the working class may still play a role and certainly could be an ally, its pride of place is subsumed, with workers being just another subtype of the “oppressed”, holding a no more or less important place in social revolution than other subtypes. This leads to numerous issues in the theories of subaltern-vanguards, as the theorists of such groups have not tended to fill in the “blanks” left in a proletariat-shorn Marxism as regards broader economic/material dynamics that serve as the basis for the class-vanguard dynamic of History and society. In practice, vanguardism in the subaltern transition often takes on the idealism of nation-vanguardism in contrast to the materialism of “pure” class- and race-vanguardism; while material conditions still remain important (at least theoretically), it is the *experience* of oppression (usually connected to the suffering of alienation) that creates the epistemologically-privileged population(s). It is in this experiential/idealist (more than materialist) focus that permits the subsistence-level peasant in Vietnam, the formerly colonized of various countries in Africa, the African-American in Los Angeles, the bourgeois female of Chicago, and the bourgeois New Left student of Paris to be fellow members of the “subaltern”.

To understand this mixture of class-vanguard ideational structure with nation-vanguard idealism in the derivative style of the subaltern transition, we must turn to context of the transition’s start. On the one hand, many of the key thinkers in the early period of subaltern-vanguardism were explicitly class-vanguards, including Lenin, Mao, Ho, and Fanon, among others. Beyond class-vanguardism, however, a unifying thread between these thinkers is the attempt to defend Marxist theory in their own contexts, often in terms of “anti-imperialism”; nations or regions where classical Marxism (or the “orthodoxy” of the Second International) would deny that the conditions for a “true” class revolution did not exist. The Russian Revolution of 1917, in this sense, was an inspiration both for “pure” class-vanguards as well as for the anticolonial subaltern vanguards of later decades. In coming to terms with the lack of proletariat revolution (much less success) in the areas predicted by Marxism, Lenin’s *Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1987 [1917]) became one of the key texts for later subaltern groups. Viewing the relation between bourgeois and proletariat as not only within a country but also between countries in a global arena of finance capitalism, Lenin sought to explain how a comparatively “backward” country like Russia could be at the forefront of real social revolution, as well as the role of the “labor aristocracy” in developed capitalist economies that would benefit from exploitation of colonial territories. Similarly, the success of the Chinese Communist revolution – and the moves by

the PRC to act as a beacon to “Third World” liberation movements and international Communism in general (Lüthi 2008: 160–174; Chan 2001: 47; Schram 1989: 115–118) – as well as statements on imperialism from Mao (for instance, Mao 2007 [1956]) cemented this connection.

Moreover, Mao and the Chinese Communist Party could be viewed, in conjunction with Castro’s revolt in Cuba as well as Ho’s Vietnam, as the first truly non-European radical revolutions to gain global attention. While Tsarist Russia was often viewed as peripheral to the broader European system, its “Europeanness” was often still noted. These non-Western revolutions, on the other hand, clearly fell outside Europe, in clearly colonized countries (or, in the case of Cuba, client states); this gave the appearance of a “new way” for revolution, one separated from the perceived inherent colonialism and racialism of Europe and Western societies. Other revolutions outside of the West, even if not as clearly anticolonial, would also energize the “new way” of revolution, be it the revolution in Egypt (Choueiri 2000: 179–194) and the PLO (Dawisha 2003: 256–260). One thing these movements shared was a common Enemy; as Adeed Dawisha notes in the case of Nasir, his orientation toward Arab nationalism was “it was a means to achieve some other goal or value, and in that period, the primary goal and paramount value was the struggle against British and Western imperial policies” (Dawisha 2003: 139).

On the other hand, many of the conceptualizations that arise that focus on “nation” or groups outside of class share notable similarities to notions that arise in nation-vanguardism, as found in Fascist Italy (such as that of Gentile or Mussolini).<sup>4</sup> When the Zapatista National Liberation Army declared war against the Mexican government in 1994, their words – showing a mixture of notions such as betrayal, foreign influence, and the importance of productivism – would be hard to distinguish from an Italian nation-vanguard in 1922:

We are the inheritors of the true builders of our nation. We are the dispossessed. We are millions and we call upon our brothers and sisters to join this struggle, so that we will not die of hunger due to the insatiable ambition of a 70-year dictatorship led by a clique of traitors that represent the most conservative and sellout groups. They are ... the same ones that sold half our country to the foreign invader, the same ones that imported a European prince to rule our country, ... the same ones that today take absolutely everything from us, absolutely everything.

(“First Declaration ...” 2002 [1994]: 218–219)

More to the point, the expansion of different categories – racial groups, women, and other populations – deriving from the extensions of class-vanguardism to postcolonial conditions provides a strongly non-class based imperative at the heart of subalternism. New methods of explaining the epistemologically-privileged population, therefore, would be necessary.

In the West, influencing vanguardist thinkers/movements as well as others,<sup>5</sup> a key figure in this change is Antonio Gramsci, who lived and wrote during the inter-war period. While explicitly writing within a Marxist paradigm and operating in a class-vanguard style under the influence of Stalinist Third International, Gramsci provided two key elements for the later subaltern vanguard: the general notion of “subalterns”, and the emphasis on “hegemony”. His emphasis on the importance of “hegemony”, of ideas and culture, would have a long-standing effect on the methodologies and perceptions of what category was “privileged” in the future. As Gramsci puts it,

Political leadership becomes an aspect of domination, in that the absorption of the elites of the enemy classes results in their decapitation and renders them impotent. There can and there must be a “political hegemony” even before assuming government power, and in order to exercise political leadership or hegemony one must not count solely on the power and material force that is given by government.

*(Gramsci 1992: 137; compare Mosca 1939: 464)*

Hegemony could apply to any class (or group), but for Gramsci, “what was required was a prefigurative counter-hegemony, which would undermine the power of the bourgeois ideology over the masses through a process of political education” (Jay 1984: 165). For the social revolution, “subaltern” populations would play a significant role. As against dominant (or “hegemonic”) populations,

[t]he history of subaltern social groups is necessarily fragmented and episodic. ... Subaltern groups are always subject to the activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel and rise up: only “permanent” victory breaks their subordination, and that not immediately.

*(Gramsci 1971: 54–55)*

Gramsci was not alone in integrating non-Marxist ideas into class-oriented ideologies; one sees this in Western Marxism, where the combination of Freudian notions of “repression” intermixed with views on alienation from Marx, best exemplified among the “New Left” in theorists such as Herbert Marcuse (1978; 1969; 1964). But perhaps the best example of this move is seen in the works of Frantz Fanon.

### Fanon as Exemplar of Subaltern Derivativism

Fanon’s works were read by many subaltern-vanguard groups, such as the Black Panther Party (Newton 1973: 116), and indeed presented an angle on subaltern populations that were less available to someone like Marcuse (see, for instance, Nakhleh 1971: 185–186). A large part of this authority comes from the author

himself: while both Marcuse and Fanon were personally familiar with oppression (Nazi Germany and colonial France, respectively), Fanon's active work with the anti-colonial *Front de Libération Nationale* would appear more "authentic" than Marcuse's comparatively "armchair" service in the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS) during the Second World War. Fanon's early death in 1961 could also provide an additional romanticism around the author (such as one might see around Che Guevara) which Marcuse, even as the "guru" of the New Left, would lack. Moving specifically to Fanon's works, there are four major traits we can identify in Fanon's work that make him an exemplar for subaltern-vanguard thinking. First, Fanon's thinking emphasizes the role of oppressed populations that are not solely class-based. As Ali points out (using the language of Gramsci), "Fanon sees the construction of such subaltern hegemony in "backward" situations as being central, suggesting that it is a more universal revolutionary strategy than that restricted to advanced capitalist societies" (Ali 2015: 246; also see 247–252). Through his analysis of other "revolutionary" populations, Fanon would note that the epistemologically-privileged population in "pure" class-vanguardism might actually be counter-revolutionary. In contrast to Lenin, this reactionary working class need not only exist within the "imperialist" states, but indeed would be found in areas ripe for revolution at the margins:

For the day after independence is declared the trade unions realize that if their social demands were to be expressed, they would scandalize the rest of the nation: for the workers are in fact the most favored section of the population, and represent the most comfortably off fraction of the people.

(Fanon 1963: 122)

This echoes similar ideas of Western subaltern-vanguard groups that increasingly viewed the working class as an oppressor rather than an ally (for the example of the Weather Underground Organization, see Varon 2004: 50).

Second, while his writings have a significant orientation toward Marxism (and class-vanguardism generally) in his orientation toward social revolution and the end of oppression, they are not Marxist texts in a traditional sense. Instead, "[f]or Fanon, the dialectic was alive: phenomenological rather than abstract; it was about lived experience, yes, but lived experience as resistance, revolt and struggle reflected in actuality and in ideas" (Gibson 2005: 90; see also Gidwani 2008). Some of his language may sound more Hegelian than Marxian,<sup>6</sup> and indeed, various of his statements would sound similar to nation-vanguardism:

The responsibility of the native man of culture is not a responsibility vis-à-vis his national culture, but a global responsibility with regard to the totality of the nation, whose culture merely, after all, represents one aspect of that nation.

(Fanon 1963: 232–233)



The distinction between Fanon and nation-vanguardism comes from his focus on a broader “struggle for freedom”, a term Fanon uses in place of traditional Marxian terminology of “international proletarian revolution”.<sup>7</sup> As such, Fanon’s nationalistic arguments fit within the larger context of a social revolution against oppression; while previous nation-vanguardists may have had similar notions (of “proletarian nations” against “plutocratic nations”), Fanon’s views fit into an implicit, if not theoretically explicated, class-based notion of totality and History. One can see similar moves within various subaltern-vanguard groups, such as the Black Panther Party. For instance, Newton explained that, after starting as black nationalists,

we decided that what was really needed was revolutionary nationalism, that is, nationalism with socialism. After analyzing conditions a little more, we found that it was impractical and even contradictory. Therefore, we went to a higher level of consciousness. ... So we called ourselves Internationalists.

*(Newton 2009a [1970]: 31)*

Third, Fanon’s use of implicit language for Marxian ideational structures serves to open up this class-based system for use by non-economic epistemologically-privileged populations, while simultaneously obscuring theoretical (and practical) difficulties in such a merging. Part of a general trend toward the “Hegelian” turn in Marxism outside of Marxist-Leninist zones, subaltern-vanguard theory absorbed Hegel’s master-slave dialectic (discussed in Chapter 3) as the motor of History, even if this dialectic comes through in Marxian terminology. In a sense, the focus on the proletariat in Marx (and continued in various class-vanguard groups) is simply an instance of the master-slave dialectic, but transformed into the ultimate and terminal instance of this interaction. Hegel is not taken on without modification, of course. Fanon provides the best example in his contrast of the colonial subject:

For Hegel, there is reciprocity; here the master scorns the consciousness of the slave. ... The black slave wants to be like his master. Therefore he is less independent than the Hegelian slave. For Hegel, the slave turns away from the master and turns towards the object. Here the slave turns toward the master and abandons the object.

*(Fanon 2008 [1952]: 195 fn.10; compare Smith 1992)*

Fanon’s discussion here points to his other major exemplar trait for subaltern-vanguardism: specifically, the notion that the slavery in question is much deeper and substantive than recognized by Hegel (or other “bourgeois” thinkers).

Finally, through his use of psychoanalysis and similar methods, Fanon marks a significant shift from the “pure” vanguard forms – primarily focused on external structures (be it class/racial material or national cultural institutions/practices)

– to “internal” factors, specifically the situation in colonialism where “[t]he natives are dehumanized, and thus they are anxious, insecure, devalued, abandoned, hypersensitive, and feel worthless” (Forsythe 1973: 161). In a way, this internal focus appears similar to the focus on motivation and will one sees in nation- and race-vanguardism (or, even earlier, in the works of Sorel), but Fanon’s focus is not necessarily on the internal motivations for action, but rather on the internal experience (and psychological trauma) of oppression by subaltern populations (see Jules-Rosette 2007: 276–277). This internal focus both opens the subaltern-vanguard to the “real” reality of History, while also providing the avenue through which proper revolutionary strategy and “*praxis*” can emerge:

Fanon’s answer, from his interest in thinking through the dialectic of experience, rather than in generating principles in idealist abstraction from lived experience of struggle, is that engaged scrupulousness emerges from militancy and that there must then be a struggle within the struggle to subordinate militancy to scrupulousness. In other words, the project of militant revolt produces, through its defeats and failings, an opportunity for a praxis of reflection and dialogue which can then become the project to which militancy has the relation of a tool to consciousness.

(Desai and Pithouse 2004: 300)

The focus on experience, however, does not mean that the more nation-vanguardist focus on the emotional, nonrational, and expressive, vanishes from subaltern-vanguardism, particularly in terms of the “performative” aspects of life or a vague notion of “recognition”:

Fanon explored the overtly violent domination of the colonial order, and developed a theory of revolutionary violence not only as a necessity for the overthrow of colonial domination, but also as a practice which liberates the colonial subject from a sense of inferiority.

(von Holt 2012: 113)

The combination of these factors, when seen in the practice of subaltern-vanguardism, leads to what often becomes a cult of action, violence, and the “promethean gesture” (Aron 1962: 36). As a “science” of action rather than original doctrine, legitimacy lies with those who take the initiative in an intelligent way. Not as adventurers who lack any chance of success; rather, groups that analyze the societal situation, noting the viability of strategies and tactics that can “spark” the creation of a mass party/movement, finally resulting in full revolution by the oppressed against the oppressor (see, for example, Weather Underground 1974: 3–4). Mixing Sorel and Lenin in addition to various postcolonial or national liberation writers/leaders, many subalterns effectively believe they – and they (or their allies) alone – can serve as the “spark”, leading to a “general strike” type

of event with mass participation (see Fanon 1963: 143–147; see also Mao 2007 [1930]: 33–36). But unlike the “pure” forms of vanguardism, where one specific population brings about social revolution, the struggle against “oppression” fundamentally involves coordination and alliance between various subaltern groups.

## Category and Alliance

Unlike most of the other vanguards, subaltern vanguardism is syncretistic. The epistemologically-privileged population is more amorphous than for others, as “oppression” can include issues of economics, gender, race, national origin, sexual orientation, or a host of others. What unifies these groups is “oppression”, a term that can have multiple different meanings, varying from focusing on alienation, to a concern about reification, to an accusation of preventing an “authentic” life. As in the case of History, much of the language on “oppression” derives from class-based ideologies, but also can contain elements from Freudian psychoanalysis on repression as well as analyses on differential power (among others). For the purposes of this study, I will use a definition of oppression that is somewhat broad (as in the case with “subaltern”) in an attempt to include these elements. Although not the most elegant of definitions, we can say that “oppression” for subaltern-vanguardism means:

to suffer under actions/structures that create, maintain, or otherwise perpetuate unjustified differences in power (broadly understood) and/or deny an individual/group its experiences and authentic manner of living, doing so in a manner that privileges dominant/hegemonic groups/systems.

It is by suffering under this oppression, reflected in exploitation as well as in lack of power (also broadly defined), that provides the subaltern category its unique insight into reality.

A core element for this category is the view that the oppressed are alienated by contemporary forms of social interaction. The abstract nature of alienation permits the expansion of the epistemologically-privileged category to cover a much broader population than that found in other vanguard systems: alienation originating from structural or systemic oppression can apply to class, nationality, gender, or nearly any other form of categorization.

We should deal with the factions just as we deal with any other group or party that claims to be revolutionary. We should try to judge, somehow, whether they are operating in a sincere revolutionary fashion and from a really oppressed situation.

*(Newton 2009b [1970]: 155)*

We must distinguish between two levels of the oppressed under consideration. The first level is unique to subaltern-vanguards when compared to other vanguard

groups; this is the importance of alliances within the category itself. Certainly, other vanguard types form alliances; vanguards of the proletariat seeking allies in the peasantry, “culture-founding” race-vanguards aligning with “culture-bearing” races, and so forth. But for subaltern-vanguards, alliances among the oppressed are not merely tactical; at a fundamental level, *all* subalterns are on the same “side”. Unified in being oppressed, the diverse subaltern groups are parts of a continuum of resistance against the “oppressor” Enemy. At a fundamental level, the subaltern category is based on alliance against oppressors in a unique manner; the oppressed take many forms, while the oppressor generally remains the same. Membership in one or the other category is based on oppression; the practical result of this dynamic is that membership in the category of the oppressed depends significantly on recognition of oppression by previous subaltern members.<sup>8</sup> There are two major practical results of this coalition style of categorization. First, it complicates the classification of vanguard groups themselves, in particular groups that could be labeled nation-vanguards. The Palestine Liberation Organization provides a useful example: in terms of its ideology and organizational style, it is a moderately typical instance of a nation-vanguard party. But in the broader context of the post-war era, the formation of post-colonialism and anti-imperialism leads to the PLO being viewed as another subaltern vanguard rather than a nationalistic one (in the sense of Italian Fascism) or militia. In contrast, another nation-vanguard party in the Middle East – the Ba’athists – while exhibiting similar ideological and organizational traits to the PLO (although focused more on “Arabism” than Palestinian national identity), generally was not recognized as an ally by subaltern-vanguard groups. A likely reason for this difference comes from the two organizations’ varied responses to Marxism; while the PLO was more agreeable to interacting with Marxian-influenced organizations (most notably, the member-group/faction Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine [PFLP]), the Ba’athists, like previous nation-vanguard parties, remained staunchly anti-Marxist. The second major result is the tendency for subaltern groups to shift from one privileged sub-population to another within the broader coalition. As the epistemologically-privileged population is less defined in subaltern-vanguardism than among others, a group that initially views one sub-population as most important can, over time, shift to another, often a result of interactions with another coalition member. The Japanese Red Army provides a clear example: beginning as an anti-capitalist organization with strong class-based leanings, it gradually becomes more of a post-colonial group acting to liberate Middle Eastern populations from “imperialism”. One member, Kozo Okamoto, would even later convert to Islam while living in Lebanon (see Gray 2013: 671). Various “New Left” vanguard groups, such as the Red Army Faction and the Weather Underground Organization, provide additional examples, as these groups gradually shifted from a more typically Leninist class-vanguard focus to a broader focus on “anti-imperialism” and the expansion of the epistemologically-privileged population in addition to, or even above, the proletariat (see Varon 2004).

To illustrate, we can look at the example of groups that are subaltern in many ways, but *not* generally regarded as allies by subaltern groups. White supremacist race-vanguard groups are a key example. In the era after the Second World War, race-vanguard organizations have shifted their priorities, forming smaller and more tightly connected cells that aim to “spark” a mass movement, with the cell serving as the kernel of a (later) mass political party. According to William Pierce,

when conditions were ripe, the National Alliance could finally achieve the leadership it had long sought. But only by forging an organisation that restricted its recruitment to the “elite minority capable of responding to our message” could it finally triumph.

(Durham 2005: 164)

The Order, which operated in the United States between 1983 and 1985 before its leader, Robert Matthews,<sup>9</sup> died in a shoot-out with police and ten members were sentenced to prison, serves as a good example of this smaller type of race-vanguard organization (Hamm 2007: 116–153; Barkun 1997: 228–233). The name of the group itself and much of its structure were inspired by Pierce’s racist novel *The Turner Diaries* (Macdonald 1980), and its aim to act as the “spark” for the formation of a larger, mass-based racist social revolution are reflected in the Order’s use of stolen funds to bankroll various other racist groups as a means of expanding the movement (Hamm 2007: 139–140). While showing many of the same organizational traits as organizations in the subaltern transition period – and often using some of the same rhetoric, tropes, and organizational styles, and even seeking alliances with other extremist categories (Hamm 2007: 128) – race-vanguards tend to remain separate from them. This avoidance of many (but not all) race-vanguards by subaltern-vanguards is explicable mostly through the alliance foundation in the subaltern transition. First, most white supremacist race-vanguard groups of this type (in contrast to groups like the Black Liberation Army) are stringently anti-Marxist; as a derivative form of Marxian discourse is the *lingua franca* of subaltern-vanguardism, white race-vanguards would be rejected as allies for similar reasons as the Ba’athists in the Middle East. Second, many white race-vanguards, particularly that of Pierce, were of an explicitly materialist form (Pierce 2012), which would tend against the more idealist style of subaltern-vanguardism. However, this materialist tendency is not necessarily consistent across white race-vanguards; one can note the “Odinism” of the Order’s leader, the partially materialist/partially idealist definition of “white” by Order member David Lane (2008: 341–342), or the pseudo-mystical definition from member Frank L. DeSilva that “The use of the word ‘race’ is not strictly limited to a metaphor of ‘skin color’, but encompasses a much larger and healthy appreciation, some would say, an almost *spiritual* metaphor, of the *collective essence* of an entire organism” [emphasis in original] (DeSilva 2012: xiii).

The second level of oppression creates areas of conflict within subaltern-vanguardism itself. For any given subaltern-vanguardist group, a particular subset of the oppressed will have pride of place. For the Black Liberation Army, it was African-Americans (Muntaqim 2002: 3, 15); for Queer Nation, it was homosexual populations (Wolf 2009: 190–193), and so forth. One could say that the particular form of alienation/oppression suffered by one of these specific subaltern groups provides the necessary epistemological access to reality, seeing the broader dynamics of oppression that affect other populations. The ongoing organizational issue, however, is the belief (perhaps presumption) that a group's own particular subaltern group is a type of *primus inter pares*, equal with others in the coalition of the subaltern and yet still slightly more oppressed/knowledgeable than the others, thus deserving of a leadership role or at least additional authority in determining theory, tactics, and direction.<sup>10</sup> It is certainly theoretically possible that a vanguard organization could attempt to form that would not exhibit these issues – one could look at the arguments of Hardt and Negri (2000) as an attempt at such a foundation, in many ways going back to a class formulation – factionalism has prevented the formation of such a group, much less party. This is not to say that these organizations refuse to work with one another, which brings us to the most distinctive aspect of subaltern-vanguardism.

Here, we observe a systemic issue that has inhibited groups of the subaltern transition, arising from its derivative nature and its syncretism: specifically, how this understanding of experiential alienation and oppression (the comparatively vague “science” of subaltern-vanguardism) operates as connected to the epistemologically-privileged category. In the Red Army Faction's terminology, “The commitment to the revolutionary struggle can only come from one's own experience of the system and its brutality and destructiveness, and from one's own goals and ideas of how one wants to live” (Red Army Faction 1992 [1990]: 73). This problem is best explained by comparison with the classical vanguard types. Although the privileged population has epistemological access, most previous vanguard groups did not view population membership as solely related to level of knowledge. A born-and-raised proletarian or a “pure-blooded” Aryan might be expected to have insights into class- or race-based vanguardism that are better developed than those who are not as “pure” (such as declassed members of the bourgeoisie or individuals with a less “clean” lineage), but within these systems, other factors also played a role that might mitigate such insights (or give the less “pure” better insight). As noted in earlier chapters, a significant ideological trait in vanguard organizations is the belief that the epistemologically-privileged population, while having access to Historical truth, also have a systemically entrenched weakness that prevents full realization, be it the inherent habitual “spontaneity” of the working class or the lack of will on the part of the superior race. But in the case of groups in the subaltern transition – which shows some similarities to nation-vanguardism in this area – the connection between Historical knowledge and the experience of alienation/oppression is seen as almost complete; as such,

discussions on tactics, strategy, and even the internal organizational structure itself are often stymied by arguments over which population (and the individuals representing them) are the most “oppressed”, and thus most knowledgeable.

This syncretism is also one of its greatest weaknesses, as these various sub-types may conflict over proper methodology or action (should race or gender be prominent; what is the relationship between identity oppression and capitalism oppression; does religion have a role, etc.). The twin bases for the subaltern category – the experience of systemic oppression and recognition by other oppressed groups – also create significant tensions, evident in vanguard and non-vanguard movements during the subaltern transition. Syncretism thus leads to what can be called the “Donatist Syndrome”<sup>11</sup> of schismaticism. The need for mutual recognition – always containing within it the risk that the new group may have the rank of most oppressed/knowledgeable as a result of delayed recognition – creates a complicated and jarring dynamic among these groups, which also adds to the comparative weakness of this style of vanguardism. The internal rifts are noticeable within the more dominant, “Left” form of subaltern-vanguardism, but can also be evident in “Right” subalterns as well.<sup>12</sup> The variety of subaltern populations, differing on which group has the greatest epistemological access to History’s dynamics, still find areas for alliance. These alliances form only partially from similar methods or ideology – the primary driving force for cooperation is the importance of the shared Enemy.

### The Dominion of a Dark God

As with all vanguard groups, these disparate groups view the present totality as inherently corrupted and unjust. Given the numerous epistemologically-privileged populations within the subaltern transition’s alliance formation, the specific engine of corruption can be unclear, given the numerous perceived causes of oppression. Capitalist exploitation now also connects domestically to racism against minorities and internationally to ethnocentric chauvinism in crushing postcolonial peoples. The cultural norms and instrumentalist rationality that reproduce capitalism also actively discriminate against and subjugate women in patriarchal fashion. The constant linguistic encoding that creates, accentuates, and sustains neoliberalism simultaneously reasserts heteronormative language structures that persecute varying sexual orientations. With each additional subaltern population, the previously expansive totalism of economics in class-vanguardism becomes an overwhelming, all-embracing, and yet intimately connected constellation of oppression. Unification of these disparate groups and their varying notions of oppression comes from harmony on the subject of the Enemy. More than any other type of vanguardism, groups during the subaltern transition are unified through what they are *against* much more than what they are *for*. In a substantial manner, it is the Enemy that makes the subaltern what it is. While the other vanguard groups point to attributes of the epistemologically-privileged population in addition to oppression – including the role in the larger economy,

geopolitical placement, racial characteristics, or others – the defining characteristic for subalterns is the fact of oppression. As Newton writes,

We should never say a whole movement is dishonest when in fact they are trying to be honest. They are just making honest mistakes. Friends are allowed to make mistakes. *The enemy is not allowed to make mistakes because his whole existence is a mistake, and we suffer from it.*  
*[emphasis added] (Newton 2009b [1970]: 155)*

Without the Enemy, the subaltern could not exist.

Structurally, the most adequate comparison would be the “Dark Principle” or “evil god” of Gnostic mythology (Stoyanov 2000: 86–96; also see Gray 2014: 536–537): the Enemy is an omnipresent, oppressive agent that seeps its influence into every aspect of life. As the “evil god” in Gnosticism is the author of the decayed matter of reality, so too the Enemy is the creator of the present totality of oppression. The Enemy becomes the linking component in the alliance formation of subaltern transition’s various vanguard groups. While the most foundational aspect of the Enemy (capitalism/neoliberalism, patriarchy, racism, etc.) may vary between the allied subaltern groups, the Enemy itself entails all of these oppressive characteristics. The Enemy serves, then, as a mirror image of the vanguard groups’ alliance formation; just as these groups are linked by the common thread of oppression, so too (in their view) the specific causes of oppression are linked to the overarching “blob” of the Enemy. Similarly, as the subaltern become increasingly diverse and fluid, the Enemy becomes increasingly essentialized and unitary; rather than multiple Enemies (economic, gender-based, racial), there is the single oppressive Enemy, where the different parts are merely “aspects” of the Enemy itself.

Regardless of the type of subaltern focus, however, the main Enemy remains “oppressors”. In practice, the “oppressor” will inevitably include capitalists/bourgeoisie, patriarchy, racism/imperialism, and (more specifically) the United States, and (usually) Israel. Racism, sexism, imperialism, and others are connected with capitalism, as the relation is usually viewed as symbiotic: that capitalism spreads and intensifies these forms of oppression, and these forms of oppression tend to reify and strengthen capitalism. Additional “oppressors” often depend upon the specific vanguard group, but it tends to include the state in which one lives. For the Red Army Faction, the German Federal Republic was an enabler of American imperialism, as noted when claiming “West Germany and West Berlin shall no longer be a safe hinterland for the strategy of extermination against Vietnam” (Schelm 2009 [1972]: 174). Similarly, comparatively minor groups within one’s country may be raised to the level of world-historic, such as the Autonomists in Italy (see Hardt and Negri 2005: 82). One likely reason for this emphasis on one’s own society is the role of guilt, which seems to have driven many of the subaltern vanguards. This guilt often still points to rich versus poor (somewhat in



the style of class-vanguards, but with some of the class distinctions blurring), but other categorizations that are not directly class-based also become the foundation for guilt, be it “white guilt” in the United States over the maltreatment of African Americans, or guilt of the post-war generation Germans over the actions of their parents in Nazi Germany, or guilt in other (primarily European) countries over colonial and/or post-colonial policies by their nations (see Bruckner 2010). The role of guilt is similar to the bourgeois discomfort in the Victorian era of worker oppression, and also played a role for writers and intellectuals in America during the period of the Great Depression (Diggins 1992: 147–149), but takes on an almost “blood guilt” nature in the subaltern form (evident among the Students for a Democratic Society [SDS] and its later faction, the Weather Underground). First, this guilt becomes much broader; rather than being to blame for abuses against one class in one’s own society, increasingly one is guilty of crimes against multiple populations within one’s country as well as for abuses direct and indirect internationally. The odd result is a form of reverse jingoism, as all evils of the world come to be blamed on the “oppressors” (from which many of the actors in certain subaltern-vanguard movements were born and raised).

Additionally, another significant difference in the subaltern transition is what can be called the “essentialism” of the guilty Enemy; the Victorian bourgeoisie of the past was merely guilty from its class position, but it was conceivable that one could become “declassed” in one manner or another. But the “oppressor” of the subaltern is not merely classist – he is also a racial supremacist, an enabler of patriarchy, an exterminator of indigenous cultures, a heteronormative puritan, and much else. As the number of aggrieved categories increases, so too does the overwhelming guilt and responsibility of the “oppressor” Enemy category becomes more all-encompassing.<sup>13</sup> One can see an example of this mentality in a manifesto from Queer Nation in 1990,

Until I can enjoy the same freedom of movement and sexuality, as straights, [*sic*] their privilege must stop and it must be given over to me and my queer sisters and brothers. Straight people will not do this voluntarily and so must be forced into it. Straights must be frightened into it. Terrorized into it.

(quoted in Wolf 2009: 176)

The amorphous, “blob” nature of the Enemy develops out of the expansion of the Enemy category (and its power) over time, especially in the history of class-vanguards specifically and Marxism broadly, with the historical failures of class-vanguards in the developed West, and the explanations of these failures among Western Marxists and radicals, providing direction. Although Marxist theorists (as well as more explicitly vanguardist thinkers) noted in earlier periods the importance of ideology and cultural norms in maintaining capitalist dominance, these norms become increasingly prominent as explanations for postwar (and post-Gramsci) Marxists. Emphasizing the “instrumentalist” nature of reason as well

as norms that would not appear directly connected to capitalism, such as certain sexual norms, the capitalist “net” ensnaring the oppressed workers increasingly was viewed as primarily mental and ideological in structure, while the material foundations (although still relevant) were of less importance. Going even beyond the “constraining” types of rationality found in capitalist systems, now even language itself reproduced and perpetuated oppression. Implicating social arrangements, cultural norms, rationality, and indeed even language, oppression saturates all parts of existence: in the *Matrix*-inspired title of one of Zizek’s texts, overarching oppression is “the desert of the real” (Zizek 2002).

### **From Vanguard of Mass Party to Vanguard to “Spark” the Mass**

These historical changes helped to instigate a major organizational change for subaltern-vanguards, which in turn influenced the ideology of these groups. While the desire for mass movements remained, such groups moved toward guerrilla structures or cell-structures. However, what distinguishes subaltern-vanguard organizations from typical guerrilla or cell organizations is their desire to serve as a “spark” for a large-scale movement of the oppressed to instigate a social revolution. The examples of the Cuban Revolution (and the strategies of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara as guidance), as well as the popularity of Debray’s analysis for insurrection (1967) focused on guerrilla warfare, help illustrate this change. In other words, the aims of these vanguards remain structurally similar to other vanguard groups, but the organizational structure has been modified to recognize the additional constraints upon success for such organizations, especially within postindustrial and developed nations.

This distinction is not minor; as noted in Chapter 5, the difference between militias and vanguards is their organizational structure, which in turn has strong ideological repercussions. Militias and guerrillas share many organizational characteristics; would this not place such subaltern-vanguard groups out of the vanguard framework? All things being equal, the answer would be yes, and in certain borderline cases (such as the FARC of Colombia perhaps after 1982), this distinction holds. But while guerrillas and militias overlap significantly, the key difference is in their varying perceptions of how they will expand their organizations in the future. As noted in the earlier discussion on militias, these groups at best desire the passive acceptance of the population for their aims, and do not envision themselves as forming a mass-based political party as they gain influence and power. Even should they gain control of the state, the organizational aim is not to become a mass-based party, with any post hoc attempts to create one meant at best as a tool for legitimization or stability.<sup>14</sup> For subaltern-vanguards, on the other hand, the organizational aim remains the creation of a mass-based political party to gain and maintain power. In simplified form, these groups often view themselves as the necessary precursor organizations that will spawn the type of mass parties and movements envisioned

and achieved by past vanguard groups. As such, the morality of the vanguard group partially shifts: unlike in the “pure” forms, where it is the achievement of the final social revolution that determines moral and immoral, for the subaltern “revolutionary morality consists in striving to achieve the Party’s objective” [emphasis removed] (Ho 2007 [1958]: 156). It is not that the Party has supplanted the epistemologically-privileged population during the subaltern transition; rather, it is that the “party” in this case is the precursor group to the full, “real” mass-based party of the “oppressed” category. In the communiques from the Fighting Communist Cells (1992 [1985]; 1992 [1984]), for instance, one sees multiple implicit (and occasionally explicit) references to this notion. Although the aim remains the mass-party, the tactics and strategies of subaltern-vanguards are modified to reflect the reality of being much more isolated and removed from the mass population.

This isolation is a more dominant feature when considering the “national liberation” movements, focused on the isolation of the colonized. For Fanon, with his focus on the condition of the colonized (see, for instance, Fanon 1965), this isolation is both internal and external: “The North African on the threshold of the French Nation – which is, we are told, his as well – experiences in the political realm, on the plane of citizenship, an imbroglio which no one is willing to face” (Fanon 1967: 13). While Fanon’s notion of “colony” appears to be specified for countries that are (or have been) colonies, various subaltern groups would translate the “colony” notion into other areas, even in general discussions on education (for example, see Sung 2015: 367). One of the more notable examples of this translation occurs with the Black Panther Party, which emphasized the ghettoization and removal of black populations into “internal colonies”, with the belief that their subaltern efforts were of a kind with the anti-colonial efforts elsewhere (Bloom and Martin 2013: 61). Many of these organizations look to the structure and experience of previous, typically class-vanguard, groups, with organizational structure (as with other elements) being derivative of earlier forms. Further along the lines of its derivative form, the structure of these groups tends to mirror the democratic centralism found in class-vanguard groups. However, there are some important qualifications. First, the organization often takes shape as more Maoist than Leninist (and thus, democratic centralism in theory, leadership principle in practice). Second, significant elements of guerrilla and insurrectionist elements also enter in. Perceiving themselves as operating in a highly constrained political environment, where “above-ground” political activity (in the form of protests, mobilization for elections, and the like) would likely result in arrest or worse, subaltern-vanguard groups instead sought inspiration from the guerrilla activities of the various anti-colonial movements (as well as Mao’s activities when coming to power in China). The Weather Underground decision to go underground reflects this change, as they viewed

[t]he role of the clandestine organization would be to build the “consciousness for action” and prepare the way for the development of a people’s

militia. Concurrently, the role of the mass movement would include support for, and encouragement of, armed action.

(Jacobs 1997: 164; for similar views from the *Cellules Communistes Combattantes*, see *Fighting Communist Cells* 1992 [1984])

The experiences – or, as they were often viewed, failures – of past class-vanguard groups directed the vanguard groups of the subaltern transition to rely less upon the epistemologically-privileged population in practice, even if still holding them paramount in theory. As the lackadaisical proletariat movement demonstrated, mass movements of the oppressed will not arise spontaneously. Moreover, the overwhelming nature of the “oppressors” influence means that most of the mass is trapped in a consumerist or imperialist “false consciousness”. Against this passive and mindless acceptance, the group that can *and will* act with possible success therefore has legitimacy – being the organizational “spark” for consciousness and revolution results in a strong emphasis on action/*praxis*, even above doctrine, for many organizations in the subaltern transition. In this sense, subaltern-vanguards share similarities with nation-vanguards: the words used by the Italian Fascist Camillo Pellizzi that “authority is born from and as a function of a creative action” (Pellizzi 2000 [1924]: 99) could easily apply to most subaltern vanguard organizations. However, this basis for legitimation by subaltern-vanguards organizations rests on much shakier foundations than those found in other vanguard parties.

Given these circumstances, one other major organizational change is the increased tendency toward schismaticism and the aforementioned “Donatist Syndrome”. Lacking a broader party, and with the different emphasis on which oppressed group of the subaltern should have pride of place, there is a greater tendency toward organizational breakdown and factionalism. Certainly, such factionalism is evident in other types of vanguardism, but could often be avoided by the size and breadth of these groups, where clearly delineated factions could exist while also still remaining within the party. For subaltern-vanguards, however, their comparatively small size makes divisions a much greater issue, complicated by the increased differences on importance of “oppressed” groups. It is in this fragmentation that one might see the next stage of vanguardism – of what the subaltern transition is transitioning to.

## Conclusion

The syncretic nature of the subaltern transition was a strength for vanguardism insofar as it increased the number of “revolutionary” populations for attacking the status quo; indeed, in some ways, syncretism helped “mainstream” aspects of the vanguardist focus on category-based epistemology (particularly in areas of education, seen in the popularity of Freire 2001). But this strength was also its greatest weakness – split between numerous squabbling groups that viewed their own population as the most epistemologically-privileged, the late period of the transition showed two dominant trends. The first, already discussed above, is the Donatist Syndrome: riven

with internal disputes, the “advanced category” (and its vanguard party) became increasingly narrow. But there was also a second trend – the dilution of revolutionary action and ideology. With each new population, with each extended derivation from previous doctrines and practices, and with each newly added Enemy population, a dominant mode of the subaltern transition was the “Great Refusal” (see Marcuse 1964). Focused on a general opposition to an ambiguous oppression, doctrine was minimized to alliance consensus while action often became merely performance or (in the view of some activists) turning against the fundamental cause itself. Dave Foreman (one of the founders of the eco-vanguard group Earth First!) notes this conflict with subaltern vanguards within EF!

is what happened to the Greens in West Germany – a concerted effort to transform an ecological group into a leftist group. I also see a transformation to a wholeheartedly countercultural/antiestablishment style and the abandonment of biocentrism in favor of humanism.

(Foreman 1991: 219)

It is in this dilution, proportionally related to the increasing totalistic importance of the Enemy as means of alliance consolidation, that one of the most significant changes that may influence future vanguardism arose: the focus on negative eschatology. The “pure” forms of vanguardism held a notion of social revolution leading to a “new society” and a “new man”, even if all of them also used this social revolution as a counter-position to the current, fully negative totality (be it capitalist commodification, national decadence, or racial degeneration). But for the movements arising in the later stages of the subaltern transition, pessimism is the driving force. Rather than bringing about totally new social relations with the added benefit of destroying the corrupt present, these new groups instead emphasize that the current corruption will lead to full destruction, and only a social revolution can prevent it (while also, possibly, creating a good or better society in its wake). It is not that these groups in the subaltern transition have abandoned totalistic thinking, but rather that they view social revolution as the last possible means for avoiding catastrophe rather than for bringing in a new age. Using religious language for comparison, the “pure” vanguards looked forward to social revolution as the Parousia, while the later subaltern (and afterward) vanguards see social revolution as the one possible means to prevent *Götterdämmerung*.

The ambiguity of the epistemologically-privileged population, the increasing perceived strength of the Enemy, and the significant changes in telecommunications and organizational technology prevented groups formed within the subaltern transition from expanding toward mass political movements. But, in the twilight of the subaltern era, new forms of vanguardism may be forming. Before turning to the future of vanguardism, we must first consider a divergent vanguard form that is shaping the innovations and future directions of this style of politics: the vanguard of God.

## Notes

- 1 For some examples of the complexities in discussing this notion, see Morris 2010; Spivak 1988.
- 2 The best analogy to this loss of legitimacy would be comparing it to the Catholic Church: the shock would not be dissimilar to Pope Francis announcing from the Curia that a previous and glorified pontiff, Pope John Paul II, had been a neo-pagan who actively exterminated Catholics in good standing for the purposes of increasing his own power as well as extending the power of various animist groups. Such an admission would surely crush the authority of the papacy among the Catholic population.
- 3 As noted in the Introduction, we will mostly avoid labeling movements as “Right” or “Left” throughout this text, as the terms have limited utility outside of their immediate context, and can obscure more than clarify. During the subaltern transition, however, these labels become centrally important; due to its fundamentally syncretic nature, the term “Left” signified which populations and movements were “in-group” (which could include nation- and race-vanguards) while also indicating which movements/thoughts were “out-group” (even if these groups/thinkers were in significant agreement with them: Sergio Panunzio and, to an extent, Giovanni Gentile would be examples).
- 4 It should be noted here that I am not claiming a direct influence of Italian Fascism on subaltern-vanguardism. Instead, this appears to be a case of an “affinity” between the two types, reflective of similar conditions: for the Italian Fascists, the concern about “proletarian nations” mirrors the subaltern-vanguardist focus on “colonized nations”. For the influence/affinity distinction, see Shorten 2012: 77–78; also Gray 2014. However, some areas of contact appeared to exist among personnel and figures important to national liberation subaltern groups (in the Middle Eastern region especially) and some nation-vanguard and race-vanguard governments during the Second World War. An analysis of these connections – and to what extent these vanguard states influenced the later subaltern organizations – is beyond the scope of this current study.
- 5 Gramsci and others were influential on the various forms of “Western Marxism”, such as the Frankfurt School of “critical theory”. Most of these Western Marxists were not focused on vanguardist politics, although some might affect vanguard groups of the New Left, such as Herbert Marcuse.
- 6 Consider his discussion of the tensions of the black poet on whether to focus or ignore his race:

In order to put an end to this neurotic situation where I am forced to choose an unhealthy, conflictual solution, nurtured with fantasies, that is antagonistic – inhuman, in short – there is but one answer: skim over this absurd drama that others have staged around me; rule out these two elements that are equally unacceptable; and through the particular, reach out for the universal

*(Fanon 2008[1952]: 174).*

- 7 Fanon’s text consist in part of an attempt to adapt the categories of Marxism to the relationship between the third and first worlds in the context of decolonization: in this project, Europe and its colonial classes as a whole take on the role of the bourgeoisie, while the peasantry of the colonies take on the mantle of the proletariat and their roles in relation to ideological truth, the ethical validity of their actions and revolution are analogous
- (Finlay 2006: 384).*
- 8 It should be noted that this recognition need not be permanent. Perhaps the best example of a revolutionary organization originally recognized by other subaltern groups was the People’s Temple, led by Jim Jones; at one time allied with individuals such as Huey

- Newton and Angela Davis, the Temple has tended instead to be remembered as a cult without political content. See Reiterman with Jacobs 1982: 280–285.
- 9 For William Pierce's views/assessment of The Order's leader, see Griffin 2001: 209–224.
  - 10 To see an example of this issue, see Foster 2014; as well as Tuhkanen 2008.
  - 11 Donatism was a Christian schism in North Africa during the fourth and fifth centuries, one which the majority of the population at points may have joined. Originating in a dispute over whether a recently appointed bishop had handed over holy texts for burning during the Diocletian persecution of 302–303 AD, the “party of Donatus” (the other candidate) formed a parallel church organization. Over time, the Donatists developed a theology of purity, where a sacrament (such as baptism or appointment as bishop) lacked any spiritual reality if performed by a *traitore* or individual otherwise separated from God, and also anyone who had received such a sacrament (i.e., if person A was baptized by person B who was baptized by *traitore* C, the baptism of person A has no power). Organizationally, this would significantly weaken the Donatists, as any question of purity (which may not be open to a clear answer) would lead to increasing numbers of internal schisms (see Tilley 1997; Frend 2002 [1982]). The “Donatist syndrome”, then, can be defined as an ideological/organizational system that tends toward increased schisms resulting from its own internal structures.
  - 12 Less developed than the Left version, perhaps the best example of a Right subaltern theorist is the Russian sociologist Alexander Dugin, with his “Fourth Political Theory” (2012) as an important instance of such a system. Dugin's shifts in his movement alliances has similarities to variations within Left subaltern–vanguardism, in his case going from National Bolshevism to Eurasianism. As the Right variety of subaltern–vanguardism has been less relevant politically and ideologically, a larger discussion of it cannot be presented here.
  - 13 This language is also shared by groups similar to subaltern–vanguards, but not accepted by them, with white supremacists again as the key example. David Lane proclaims that “As always, forever and always, revolutions come from the totally disenfranchised. In this age the disenfranchised are almost exclusively young, White males” (Lane 2008: 401). In a sense, this argument is similar to Huey Newton's support for the black *lumpenproletariat* (as well as Fanon's notion of the role of the *lumpenproletariat* in anti-colonial movements; see Fanon 1963: 129–137): the key difference is the alliance recognition of Newton by other subalterns, while it is lacking toward Lane and the Order. Similarly, there are striking resemblances in rhetoric between the subaltern focus on “revolutionaries” versus “The Man” (or “the System”) and the wording of *The Turner Diaries* on the antagonism between “the Organization” and “the System” (see Macdonald 1980; Durham 2007: 101–106).
  - 14 In addition to Franco's Spain, South America provides various examples of this tendency, such as the Chilean case of Augusto Pinochet (De Felice 1976: 55).

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# 8

## VANGUARD OF GOD

Every dogma, even if it comes from the Lord of the worlds, will be stillborn if it does not find a vanguard that sacrifices itself and expends every effort in order to defend it.

*(Azzam 2008b: 140)*

Moving from the period of origins to the “Golden Age” to the subaltern transition, most vanguardist movements and organizations “fit” straightforwardly within this history. But there is one form of vanguardism which emerges as an anomaly. Pulling from traditions that precede the origins of vanguardism, often initially appearing as “fringe” movements parallel to other vanguards, and only gaining strength during the subaltern transition, this form of vanguardist organization bases itself on a non-human population, maintains other vanguardist traits, and exhibits a diversity of types within it. This odd case, perhaps the form with the greatest vitality in the current period, is religious vanguardism: the vanguard of God.

Compared to other vanguardist types, religious vanguardism presents distinctive challenges in categorization and definition. The internal diversity of religious forms within this type of vanguardism is unique, insofar as these types of movements/organizations derive not only from contemporary conditions (as discussed in Chapter 3), but additionally from religious traditions that often long precede the rise of mass politics and the contemporary era. Even when these movements and groups reinterpret these religious traditions in starkly modern terms, the previous religious traditions shape these vanguard organizations in a manner unlike those types thus far discussed. With such a level of diversity within this type of vanguardism, we can only provide a general overview of this type, noting some of the distinctions necessary for defining religious vanguardism versus other vanguards as well as other religious/organizational forms, as well as briefly examining the manner in which the vanguard of God is structured and operates.

## The “Divine” as Category and the Problem of Definition

The vanguard of God presents a distinctive problem of definition, in comparison to other vanguard types, as an organization such as Al-Qaeda (founded upon a religious foundation) does not “fit” as clearly in terms of population as one sees with, for instance, the Bolsheviks (based on the working class) or the Nazi party (focused on the Aryan race). For our purposes, our primary concern will be religious vanguard movements and organizations basing themselves upon recognized traditions of the “Divine” in established religions. As with other vanguardists, the foundation of religious vanguardism is the “population” from which the vanguard party gains its revolutionary purpose, its access to History, and its legitimacy. In this case, the “population” is God (usually in the form of a singular, monotheistic deity), or more accurately, the “Divine”.<sup>1</sup> This “population” type is a major divergence from the forms thus far discussed; while the population categories in other vanguard types often become reified (with a concrete working class, for instance, being objectified into a somewhat mythical “Proletariat”), these movements viewed themselves as the “advanced wing” of specific, *human* populations – a *human* class, a *human* nation, a *human* race. For the vanguard of God (as well as ecological forms of vanguardism, discussed in the Conclusion), human populations become secondary as part of the epistemologically-privileged population, being only a part of a larger whole that is the important population: “The scope of this struggle is not limited to this earth or to this life. The observers of this struggle are not merely a generation of men. The angels are also participants in the happenings on earth” (Qutb 2002: 152). In a sense, the “decentering” of human beings that often was the practice of “classical” vanguard groups in their reification of the category is the foundational theory for religious vanguard movements.

Defining the characteristics of the epistemologically-privileged population in vanguardist movements often presents problems, as noted in the earlier discussions. However, the difficulties of definition for the “population” of religious vanguardism are a difference of kind rather than degree. For class-vanguards, the particular class may vary (be it the proletariat, peasants, or others), but class itself – as an economic population/unit – remains structurally consistent. So too with race vanguards, where different vanguard parties dispute which specific race is world-historic, but generally share the same biologically focused view of race as such. Within religious vanguardism, this structural consistency is lacking. The contrast between monotheistic, personalistic religious vanguard groups (such as those based upon Judaism, Christianity, or Islam) versus more pantheistic forms (from perhaps Hinduism) versus vanguards of religious forms where a “God” as such does not exist (such as Buddhism) are stark, and of much greater internal significance than those arising in other vanguard types. The “Divine” in religious vanguardism can thus refer to a supra-human entity with intelligence, will, and personality, but could also refer to a supra-human “divine order” such as found in Daoism (see Jordan and Gray 2011: 84–87). Additionally, the nature of some religious traditions

themselves can create definitional issues in determining whether a particular vanguardist movement is religious or something else. For religious traditions that are non-exclusivist in membership, where kinship relations and/or geographical location do not play a role in religious participation (such as many forms of Christianity as well as Buddhism), determining the religious (or nonreligious) nature of the vanguard party is more straightforward. For religious traditions where kinship or geographical location<sup>2</sup> do play a significant part in membership, the definitional lines become more blurry; for vanguardist organizations based on Jewish nationalism or Hindu nationalism, it may be unclear at points whether it is the religious “population” or the national population that holds pride of place. In some cases, such a distinction may not exist at all.<sup>3</sup> When examining other possible “religious” vanguard groups, it will be necessary to investigate if these organizations are fundamentally “religious” in the established sense, as well as whether these “religious” groups are based on a notion of the Divine; for various of these groups, religion and the Divine may be secondary elements compared to more foundational concepts based in nation, race, or other categories.

This shift from a human to non-human epistemologically-privileged “population” creates a noticeable distance between the vanguard party organization and a “responsive” population; in other words, earlier forms of vanguardism would need to address the conflicts between what the “category” (in its reified form) seeks versus the day-to-day concerns and desires of the actually existing human populations. In the shift to the Divine, the foundational “category” of the new vanguards lack such a population: unlike workers, nationals, race members, or the “oppressed”, deities do not “speak” in a direct and unambiguous manner, a trait also shared with ecological vanguardism.<sup>4</sup> Although the Divine serves as the epistemologically-privileged population in religious vanguardism, the role of mass populations still exists. Believers, in this case, become a secondary form of “advanced population”. These believers still have a world-historic function, and they still have access to the greater dynamics of History, but these attributes are “reflections” (for lack of a better term) of their relationship to the Divine, rather than qualities necessarily inherent in traits among the population itself: “The superiority through faith is not a mere single act of will nor a passing euphoria nor a momentary passion, but it is a sense of superiority based in the permanent truth centered in the very nature of existence” (Qutb 2002: 141). More to the point, the religious vanguard party itself has as major functions the mobilization, activation, and direction of this mass population of believers. Acting as a divinely guided intermediary for the religious mass population, the vanguard party (as the “advanced wing” of the faithful) seeks to direct this population toward the “true” religion while simultaneously pushing this population to gain political and social power within a given society. For instance,

Salafis claimed to be the true purveyors of God’s word and, just as importantly, God’s law. Sharia wasn’t just a vague catchphrase: they really believed

that the strict application of Islamic law was the only legitimate way to order society.

(Hamid 2014: 13)

While this view could simply entail the imposition of a religious vanguardist system upon a general population, the aim is rather to mobilize the religious mass population to bring this earthly rule by the Divine to fruition. In the words of Ayman Al-Zawahiri,

Nor is it enough that we reject any and all calls to halt *jihad*. Instead, we call the *umma* – in all its factions, classes, and groups – to join the caravan of *jihad*, proceed in its journey, vying with one another in its performance and in defiance of its enemies.

(Al-Zawahiri 2007: 113)

The vanguard of God does not want the mass population of believers to remain passive (as one might expect in militia-style movements), but instead desires believers to act in bringing about social revolution, guided by the vanguard organization.

It is this focus on the mass population of believers as a secondary epistemologically-privileged population (after the primacy of the Divine) that can guide us in distinguishing religious vanguard organizations and movements from what are sometimes described as “cults” (for discussion on cults and “new alternative religions” more broadly, see: Lewis and Tøllefsen 2016; Cowan and Bromley 2015; Lewis 2008; Chryssides 2001; Galanter 1999). While a religious group may seek power and increased influence as well as using violent means to attain its ends, the lack of a mass nature for its desired following (in addition to its internal structure) would separate a “cult” from a religious vanguardist group. For many such “cults”, the population of believers is a small one by intention; rather than seeking mass proselytization and conversion, the base of believers is viewed instead as a “righteous remnant” that seeks isolation and removal from a corrupt or evil world rather than reshaping the world in the image of its Divine focus. Perhaps the best example of this type of cult as contrasted to a religious vanguard party/movement is the Aum Shinrikyo organization of Japan, founded by Shoko Asahara in 1987 (Watanabe 1998). Aum Shinrikyo showed some similarities with the vanguardist form, at an organizational level in its internal regimentation and use of a leadership principle style of command and ideologically in its notion of “cosmic history” (see Mettraux 1995: 1142–1146). Additionally, the identification of Enemy populations by Asahara fits within a vanguardist framework, with various of these Enemies (America, capitalists, Jews, Freemasons) already appearing in other vanguard movements. But Aum’s ideology as well as its relation to mass populations distinguishes the organization from vanguardism. Focused almost exclusively on annihilation – Asahara used the Western word “Armageddon” as the central

element of his religion – the creation of the “new world” appears to be missing. Instead, Aum focused on preparations for the world’s imminent destruction, preparing members for survival in the post-Armageddon world. While this world perhaps could be shaped by this righteous remnant along the lines of Aum’s ideology – indeed, one scholar notes that “Asahara had further stated that killing all of humanity (apart from Aum’s true believers) would be a wonderful and spiritual act” (Reader 2002: 151) – this group seemed more concerned with maintaining existence in a world after the apocalypse rather than in forcefully bringing about a “New World” and the “New Man”. Moreover, while the Aum organization engaged in proselytization and conversion efforts, these believers were viewed as members of a small population awaiting inevitable world destruction, rather than as a mass population that could (and should) be mobilized to fulfill its world-historic role. While Aum Shinrikyo certainly has similarities to a religious vanguard organization, we would have to conclude that the organization is not properly vanguardist, religious or otherwise. Other “cults” could provide additional examples of violent, organized religious groups who would not fit within the definition of religious vanguardism.<sup>5</sup>

Some alternate religious movements, such as Scientology, present other difficulties (for a good overview, see Urban 2011). As has been noted, “several people close to L. Ron Hubbard, the founder of the Church of Scientology, stated that he saw religion as a business where significant money could be made (though the Church disputes that he said this)” (Spaulding and Formentin 2017: 39). With such questions regarding its foundation, it may not be clear if Scientology (at least at its origin) is an alternative religious movement, a cult, or a rather unique “business” organization originating with Hubbard. Regardless of these problems, however, Scientology – both in its origins as well as in its current form – does not appear to be an instance of religious vanguardism. The relationship of Scientology to Hubbard provides a good example of this distinction; as Rothstein (2016) notes, a major element of Scientology’s rituals and ceremonies appears to be a strong focus on its founder. While an extensive emphasis – indeed, devotional fixation – upon leaders is also notable in many forms of vanguardism, the vanguardist leader is elevated as a personification of the epistemologically-privileged population. In the case of Scientology, it seems this devotional focus is on Hubbard as religious founder, rather than on Hubbard as exemplification of a mass-population category. Additionally, while Scientology has gained the attention of various governments, it appears that Scientology as an organization focuses on the political realm insofar as it seeks to strengthen the position of its religion (for an instance of interactions in Australia, see Doherty 2016) or to maintain its influence and control over followers (for instance, consider Urban 2006). While it may be possible that Scientology – or a sect of Scientology – could become a religious vanguard organization, its current configuration seems to place it closer to a cult or new alternative religion than toward vanguardism.



As the distinction between religious vanguardism and a cult can be unclear, as noted in these previous examples, one can divide cults from religious vanguards in at least four ways. First, cults tend to focus on maintaining a “righteous remnant” of believers rather than attempting to create a mass movement. Although cult groups often seek to expand their membership, they generally do not appear to seek mass engagement in the manner of political parties (be they ordinary or vanguard parties). Second, the eschatological focus of most cults is of a different kind than the type of vanguardist eschatology that fixates on social revolution. For the most part, cults seem more passive in their relation to the climactic end of the present society; cults seek to ensure that its “righteous remnant” survives the oncoming Armageddon, seeking “signs” that the “End of Days” is coming, without necessarily seeking to hasten the arrival of the apocalypse. Depending on the cult, actions to hasten the apocalypse may not even be a possibility. This view contrasts strongly with the vanguard notion of History, where the “End Times” (the social revolution that radically reshapes human existence) is an inevitable result of Historical dynamics, but also is “pushed along” by the epistemologically-privileged population and its “advanced cadre” in the vanguard organization. In other words, cults often view eschatological events happening *to* them and the world (and thus, the cult members are comparatively passive agents in these events), while vanguardist groups perceive these events as things *to be actively secured* by the vanguard population/organization itself. Third, cults tend to view the period after Armageddon (if the world still exists) as a wasteland where the main concern of the “righteous remnant” is bare survival – while the destruction of the previous world may provide avenues to create a “better” society (based on the cult’s beliefs and rules), the more pressing issue is simply existence. In contrast, vanguard organizations (religious or otherwise) view the destruction of the negative totality of the present as a necessary step in the creation of the “New Society” and the “New Man”. Vanguard eschatology sees the period after the “End Times” (social revolution) as the period when a better or “true” humanity can flourish: bare existence and survival is not the priority, but rather the creation of a perfect world. Finally, and on a practical level, cults generally seem uninterested in attempting to gain and maintain political power as a means of creating social revolution (or to hasten the coming of Armageddon). Instead, many cult organizations appear more inclined toward a form of separatism – gaining political influence or control over a small, comparatively isolated community/area – or to carve out a space within existing society to ensure that the cult can operate along its own internal rules. Deriving from the lack of interest by cults in bringing about social revolution, the imperative to gain political power as a means of creating social revolution simply is not present, as society itself may be viewed as a secondary concern at best (more to be avoided than changed) or the inevitability of society’s destruction makes attempts at change irrelevant. This separatist and passive tendency toward the political and social realms stands in strong contrast to all forms of vanguardism, with their heavy emphasis on bringing about radical social and political change.

There are additional problems of definition beyond differentiating religious vanguard organizations from other forms of religious organization. One issue of particular note is distinguishing vanguard organizations based upon a religion versus those groups for which religion is a secondary, even if important, element.

### **Religious Vanguardism versus Religion among Vanguardists**

A difficult conceptual problem that can arise in investigating the vanguard of God is distinguishing vanguard movements/organizations that are fundamentally religious in orientation from vanguards where religion plays a role that is secondary or ancillary. One must also distinguish religious vanguard movements from a broader notion of the “sacralisation of politics” within modern communities (Gentile 2006; see also Gray 2007). As noted in Chapter 6, there can be “border-line” cases where a clear distinction between types of vanguardism may not be possible, such as in the national, racial, and religious underpinnings of the Iron Guard of Romania (Ioanid 2005). But in most cases, clearer distinctions can be made. In order to more clearly define the vanguard of God, we should first note instances of vanguard movements/organizations that have strong religious overtones and/or notable associations of members with a specific religion, but which are better classified as other forms of vanguardism.

An example of a vanguardist-style organization that appears and makes use of religion, rather than being fundamentally religious, would be Jim Jones’ “Peoples Temple” of America (and later, Guyana). While sharing the eschatological fixation of cult groups like Aum Shinrikyo, the Peoples Temple also emphasized its membership as a vanguard toward a “New Society”, and described its members as those on the forefront of History while simultaneously overwhelmingly oppressed by the negative totality (usually framed as “capitalism” and “racism”) of the present (for an interesting linguistic analysis, see Klippenstein 2017). One would initially be warranted in believing this movement would be an instance of religious vanguardism. However, it appears the fundamental aim of Jones’ “movement” focused primarily upon a view of social justice and radical social change (particularly based on his communist-informed notion of “communalism”) with religion as merely a means to an end (Reiterman 1982; but also see Scheeres 2011: 18–19; 50–51). Although many of the Temple’s initial membership likely believed they were part of a new religious organization, as Jones became more blatant in his anti-religion rhetoric (including stomping on Bibles during sermons), one can surmise that a significant number of the members – especially those within leadership positions – were more focused on the “communalism” and social aspects of organization, with religion being at most the worship of Jones himself. As a matter of seeking a “New World” and “New Man”, the Peoples Temple would fit within a vanguardist framework, but its instrumentalist view of religion (as a transmission belt for a primarily socialist revolution) would place the organization as an instance of a subaltern vanguardist movement rather than a vanguard of God.

A useful example of a religious vanguardist movement that is secondary for a specific vanguardist organization would be the Christian Identity movement in comparison with various groups related to it. Christian Identity as an ideology is striking in its clear vanguardist formulation. As Michael Barkun notes,

First, they lay claim to possessing special knowledge – knowledge of the workings of social institutions, American society, world politics, and, ultimately, the universe itself. Second, they assert on the basis of this claim to special knowledge that they have been the victims of a gigantic, cosmic swindle engineered so successfully that non-believers cannot see that the crime has occurred.

(Barkun 1997: 119)

Connected to this view is the idea within Christian Identity of its members being “the world’s spiritual elite” (Barkun 1997: 119), who have a significant role in bringing about a “New World”. While the central characteristic of the movement is race, the racial population is secondary as part of the religiously defined “true” population of God, with “Divinity” in this case having notable neo-Gnostic and dualist overtones (for an overview of Christian Identity theology/ideology, see Quarles 2004; Berlet 2004; Barkun 1997). Straightforward instances of a politically oriented vanguard organization of Christian Identity include the Aryan Nations (Balch 2006: 85–88) and the Covenant, Sword, and the Arm of the Lord (CSA) (Brannan 2007), insofar as these groups shape and define themselves through Christian Identity. However, there are other vanguardist groups that have been viewed as “religious” because of Christian Identity members, but where a different fundamental basis for the organization is key. The best example of such a group is the “Order”, also known as the “Silent Brotherhood” or “Brüder Schweigen”. While Christian Identity members made up about a quarter of the Order’s membership (Barkun 1997: 231), it was the purely racist aims of the group that were central rather than an explicitly Christian Identity basis; beyond Christian Identity, the group included members with other racist perspectives, most notably Robert Jay Matthews (its leader) and David Lane (also the originator of the popular white separatist “14 Words”) who adhered to racist Odinism, a religion that differs significantly from Christian Identity (Gardell 2003: 193–198; also see Lane 154–157, 192–209). Moreover, the structure of the group appeared to be based explicitly upon the fictional organization described in the purely race-vanguardist novel *The Turner Diaries*. In this case, the overarching structure and aim for the Order was race-vanguardism rather than being on a religious foundation.

Missing this distinction between a religious vanguard organization and a vanguardist group can lead to questionable interpretations. For instance, Mark Juergensmeyer (2003: 31–32; 136, 149; 176–177) errs in this manner when discussing the interrelations between Timothy McVeigh, William Pierce, the Order, and Christian Identity. Juergensmeyer appears to view much of this type of racial

extremism as an instance of religious terrorism by placing particular emphasis on the role of Christian Identity. This focus, however, is problematic. The major theorist in uniting these individuals and groups – Pierce – was an atheist, who created “Cosmotheism” as another means of expressing the fundamentals of his race-based system, as well as for organizational/financial reasons (Griffin 2001: 184–187). His major influences on others – his organization (the National Alliance) and his novel (*The Turner Diaries*) – indicate little influence from Christian Identity on his thinking. Similarly, McVeigh’s religious ideas appear vague, with little to no role in his motivations for extremist actions. Finally, as already noted, the members of the Order itself showed little religious unity, instead uniting on an organizational style and goals based upon more purely race-vanguardist foundations. As such, Jurgensmeyer’s classifications regarding racist vanguard organizations tend to overemphasize the religious element to the detriment of the foundational racial element.

Problems of interpretation may be especially likely in the case of religious vanguardism. Beyond the definitional difficulties already noted, the vanguard of God provides two other challenges to interpretation. First, religious vanguardism’s historical rise diverges in various ways from the other types of vanguardism thus far described. Second, the structure of the vanguard of God shows variations from other vanguard types. While a full explanation of these points would require an extended discussion, one can now provide a brief overview.

## The Divergent History of Religious Vanguardism

The religious form of vanguardism deviates historically from other types of vanguards insofar as the vanguard of God is less directly shaped by the elements discussed in Chapter 3, as these religiously-focused movements often are responding or attempting to resist the developments that occurred during the nineteenth century. As a result, religious vanguardism often initially appears as a “fringe” or secondary part of a larger movement based on non-religious foundations, such as nationalism. Although religious vanguards, particularly those who emphasize their strict reliance on non-modern sources (such as religious scripture or the early history of a religious tradition), would likely balk at the idea that they are borrowing concepts or terms from the prehistory of vanguardism, one can see certain similarities and overlaps that indicate, if not direct borrowing, certainly at least indirect influence. As Vali Nasr notes, “While the Islamic Republic of Iran has converted the Shia ulama into a ruling class – a political as well as a religious ‘guardian’ elite – it was less Plato than Marx who set the tempo of the Iranian revolution” (Nasr 2016: 126). Another example would be the early Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt under Hasan al-Banna and his discussions of returning to a “pure” Islam, insofar as “the Brotherhood’s understanding of Islam was itself a product of modern times, influenced directly by the ideas of Rashid Rida and Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib” (Wickham 2013: 23), standing in contrast to the deeply traditionalist forms of Salafism seen in other movements and organizations.<sup>6</sup>

Religious vanguards are influenced by the general “atmosphere” of revolutionary and modern thought, but there also are reasons to suspect that there may be more direct influences as well, even if any particular religious vanguard organization would downplay these connections. A notable example would be Ruhollah Khomeini; operating during the period of the subaltern transition, he supported various “national liberation” movements during his time in France, “associating himself with the ... Front de Liberation Nationale (FLN)”, and translating works by Franz Fanon as well as Che Guevera (Brown 2000: 168–169). It would be surprising if these influences did not play a role in Khomeini’s views on the construction of his form of Islamic religious vanguardism during the Iranian Revolution and in the formation of the Islamic Republic that followed. The Islamic religious vanguardism of Hasan al-Banna and the early Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt illustrates how the vanguard of God can show significant overlaps with other types of vanguardism. Similarly, the numerous conceptual and structural overlaps between the early Muslim Brotherhood (in the period around and just after the Second World War) and nation-vanguardism gives reason to believe that it was influenced strongly by more secular forms of vanguardism. Specifically, while founded upon a religious basis, al-Banna’s organization, movement, and rhetoric shows striking similarities to nation-vanguardism, with the “nation” in this case being Islam. As al-Banna expressed this idea,

According to the Islamic understanding, the fatherland comprises: (1) the particular country first of all; (2) then it extends to the other Islamic countries, for all of them are a fatherland and an abode for the Muslims; (3) then it proceeds to the first Islamic Empire which the Pious Ancestors erected with their dear and precious blood, and over which they have raised God’s banner. ... (4) Then the fatherland of the Muslims expands to encompass the entire world.

*(al-Banna 2009: 61–62)*

The emphasis on nation (both by al-Banna and the early Muslim Brotherhood) in connection with Islam reflects the national liberation element within the movement, specifically to remove the influence of the United Kingdom. Additionally, al-Banna’s ongoing hostility to “foreign” elements in Egypt as well as his feelings of resentment toward the imperial powers share consistencies with the rhetoric and ideology of Italian Fascism (on a similar issue with “foreign” to al-Banna, see Qutb 2002: 16–17, 41). Even with these types of overlaps, al-Banna’s movement should be considered a religious vanguard movement rather than a nation-vanguard organization, as al-Banna’s nationalist focus was

[n]ot Egypt as such, but because Egypt is a Muslim land. Patriotism was sacred because it was in the service of the faith; patriotism for Egypt was

all the more possible and desirable because of Egypt's historically important relationship with Islam.

(Mitchell 1969: 264)

In the construction of the movement, the foundation in Islam – over that of country or other factors – is key (for an overview of its organizational structure, see Rinehart 2013: 30, 40–47; and Mitchell 1969: 163–184). While emphasizing the need to bring “true” Islam into Egypt, the Arabic region, and then the world, al-Banna’s vanguardist movement was not traditionalist per se. Rather, he emphasized a notion of “rebirth” with an “Islamic Renaissance”, which fits well within the “palingenetic myth” of nation-vanguards described by Roger Griffin (2012).<sup>7</sup> There is a strong case that at least some vanguardist elements would have entered into religious vanguard movements including and beyond the Muslim Brotherhood through earlier interactions, whether through colonialism, the expansion of previous vanguardist movements (and politics) into other regions, or indeed even some levels of cooperation or agreement with more established nationvanguard and/or race-vanguard politics (for instance, see Nicosia 2015; Rubin and Schwanitz 2014; and Herf 2009).

While requiring more investigation and research, one can speculate that there are at least three reasons why the historical development of religious vanguardism is comparatively indirect in relation to the sources of other vanguardist types arising in the nineteenth century. First, many of the major influences in creating vanguardist ideological structures often were explicitly anti-religious, and at best viewed the worth of religion in an instrumental fashion. The proto-vanguardist party of the Jacobins was stridently anti-clergy and often anti-theist, Hegel’s philosophy distanced the God of History in heterodox ways from the Christian religious tradition, Marx’s re-articulation of Hegel explicitly rejected religion, and religion served as an ongoing foil in the rise of scientism. For the religiously minded, and especially for religious radicals, there was little from these sources that were viewed as worthwhile, at least initially; for instance, certain types of Christian Protestant vanguard organizations would likely look to the political organization of Geneva under John Calvin as a proto-vanguard rather than the French *Comité de salut public* (see Engammare 1999, but also see Woo 2015: 236–238; Manetsch 2006). The one element in vanguardism’s prehistory that could have a direct influence on the vanguard of God would be the rise of mass society and its entry into politics, but even here, the connection between religion and mass politics during the earlier period often took the form of religious revivalism (such as the Social Gospel movement, and to an extent the early Progressive movement, in the United States). The politics of mass society, however, initially turned to non-religious forms of identity, especially along the lines of class and nation.

Second, at least within the Western world, vanguardism arose in a period where religious belief – or at least the general public observance and respect for religion –

still played a significant role among mass populations. With the exception of the French Revolution, those who would be inclined toward religious vanguardism may have surmised that the elimination of Christianity and its forms of morality, both among general population itself as well as in public life, would not occur. Conflicts would certainly exist, including the debates regarding *Laïcité* in France, the *Kulturkampf* in Bismarck's Germany between the Roman Catholic Church and the government, and skirmishes between different forms of Christianity for dominance in a given area. The potential threats from scientism or atheistic movements (particularly those aligned with class or nation) were certainly a major concern, but such a threat may have appeared more distant; in societies where religion still played a major role in public and private life, the impression may have been that an immediate threat would be something along the lines of the French Revolution's coercive mandating of irreligion, rather than a withering away of religious belief itself. When the default position for most members of a society was to believe in the Christian religion (in one form or another), the feeling that religion was under existential threat might have appeared as a concern for the future, but not a pressing concern. Only as secularism began to take a more dominant, even domineering, role in public life do religious vanguard organizations begin to appear in the West. In this changed situation, the religious vanguard could more easily conceive of themselves and their co-religionists as facing an extreme threat from an external Enemy, in a manner not dissimilar to the class-vanguard perception of the proletariat under attack from the capitalist system or the nation-vanguard view of nationals being crushed by foreign, "plutocratic" states.

Third, the appearance of religious vanguardism in non-Western societies is often intertwined historically with "national liberation" and subaltern movements. For the non-Western vanguard of God, initially they are merely one faction among numerous others in anti-colonial and post-colonial politics, operating in a hazy political atmosphere filled with reformists, traditionalists, liberals, nation-vanguards, class-vanguards, and subaltern-vanguards (among others). While sharing the same aversion to Western dominance as the other vanguard types existing in these conditions, the religious vanguard tends to stand out: while indigenous nation-vanguards (such as the Iraqi Ba'athist Party, among others) focus on the Western-created nation-state construct and the class-vanguards and subaltern-vanguards explicitly proclaim their allegiance to Western-created Marxism (and at times the somewhat Western regime of the Soviet Union), religious vanguards often reject nation-state, Marxian class analysis, and the like as other forms of colonialism's continuation. For the vanguard of God, only religion – the "true" faith – is not so corrupted by foreign and colonial elements, regardless of how anti-colonial the nation-/class-/subaltern-vanguards may be in their policy preferences. It is only as parties and regimes based upon these Western ideological forms begin to fail – be it from the extended authoritarian and totalitarian rule of Ba'athist and nationalist regimes, or in the weakening and collapse of the class-vanguard USSR – that religious vanguardism moves from the periphery to a major actor.

## Vanguard and the Divine

Based upon numerous – and highly divergent – histories, religious traditions, and locations, the vanguard of God does not lend itself to as straightforward a categorization as the vanguardist types thus far examined. The analysis here by necessity will be broad, offering a basic outline of religious vanguardism; a more detailed exposition would require an in-depth description of numerous religious traditions beyond the capability of this particular study. As with most vanguardist groups (regardless of type), “failed” religious vanguard organizations are typical, with the number achieving political victory being small. But in contrast to other vanguardist movements and organizations, these groups may be mistaken for “dead-end” tendencies within broader vanguardist movements based on other qualities (such as class or nation). As such, this section will focus on vanguard groups that are clearly religious in their foundation.

Given the variety of religious traditions which can serve as the foundation for the vanguard of God, the examples in this section will be limited mostly to instances of Islamic religious vanguardism. There are three reasons for this focus. First, these vanguardist movements provide a good reflection of the significant diversity in ideology and organization that can arise from one religious tradition; in this case, major differences arise from the divisions between Sunni and Shi’a groups, between “modernist” Islamists versus more traditionalist/fundamentalist Salafi<sup>8</sup> Islamists, between Salafist Islamists and “Salafi-Jihadists”, and so forth. Second, Islamic religious vanguardism is the most salient and active form of the vanguard of God in the current era, and thus Islamic religious vanguardism serves to clarify the importance of understanding this type of movement. Finally, the vitality of this type of religious vanguardism gives it pride of place in contemporary discussions; the sheer number of organizations, their ability to recruit new adherents, and their track record in committing major acts of violence as well as gaining and maintaining political power (especially in the case of Iran and, to a more limited extent, the “Islamic State” of Iraq and Syria under Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi), endows these examples with particular relevance. While various Islamist writers will be noted, particular emphasis will be laid on the writings of Sayyid Qutb of the Muslim Brotherhood, as his works provide a highly articulate expansion on the reasoning and structures in religious vanguardism.

As noted earlier in this chapter, the “category” for religious vanguardism is primarily Divinity, often in the form of some type of monotheistic God (but not necessarily limited to such religious traditions), with believers (or the “devout”) serving as a “secondary” population that in a sense “reflects” the “truth” from Divinity. While other vanguard types emphasize the “false consciousness” on the part of the epistemologically-privileged population (and thus the need for “consciousness-raising”), the division of primary and secondary “categories” in religious vanguardism results in potentially harsher measures against the secondary population. The primary “population” of the Divine does not suffer from false



consciousness – indeed, the Divine population is often viewed as synonymous with truth – but the secondary population of believers can fall into false consciousness (be it in lack of belief, incorrect belief, lackluster practice, and so forth). Additionally, in some forms of religious vanguardism, the secondary population could be viewed as not merely being ignorant of its role or suffering under delusions resulting from the totalistic control of information from the Enemy population, but also as acting in sin against the primary Divine population. “Sin” as an element of the epistemologically-privileged population does not directly arise in other vanguard forms (although it can appear in indirect forms in labels such as “labor aristocracy” or “race traitors”) insofar as the secondary population gains membership through *belief*, rather than through an essential *trait* (such as economic class, race, national origin, and others).<sup>9</sup> A major role of the vanguard party becomes not only to “raise” the consciousness of the secondary population, but also to purge sinful ideas, actions, and practices from the population of believers in adherence to the “truth” revealed in (and by) the primary Divine population. This purging of sin is not limited to the believer population, of course; as Qutb notes for Islamism, “This Islam has a right to remove all those obstacles which are in its path so that it may address human reason and intuition with no interference and opposition from political systems” (Qutb 2002: 74).

For the vanguards of God, History becomes a mixture of immanence and transcendence. In contrast to other vanguard movements which focused on the creation of the “New Man” and new society solely within this world, the vanguard of God sees its activities as both creating such a “New World” on Earth and extending the way to a universal transcendence beyond this life. For the vanguard of God, the view of History is based upon scriptural interpretations, and takes on a significantly eschatological tone; rather than a “new humanity” in the sense of earlier vanguards – where the human species would be advancing in some secularized sense – History now focuses on the end of the world in a complete sense, with the “new humanity” being the chosen/saved by God. In other words, the dynamics of History that will recreate the world on Earth are a sub-portion of a larger Divine History that points to afterlife and, indeed, the end of the Earth as we know it. What Divine History entails, of course, depends upon the specific religion. However, some commonalities seem typical. First, this History will be determined on earth in some manner; in other words, it will not be a celestial conflict primarily, nor will it be one that settles all things after humanity is dead. Rather, things will be “set right” in this world as well as in the next. Second, human activity is important in actualizing the goals of the Divinity, and specifically that of the vanguard organization itself. Here especially we see how faith vanguards pick up elements from the other types, as we see the same intermixing between determinism (History – whether driven by God or something else – cannot be stopped in its progress) with voluntarism (the vanguard serving as the lynchpin by which History commences in the near future or the far future): “Thus, this struggle is not a temporary phase but an eternal state – an eternal

state, as truth and falsehood cannot co-exist on this earth” (Qutb 2002: 65). Third, the Enemy category will be utterly destroyed by the forces of (Divine) History. Within the earthly realm, the purging of the Enemy is at least as important as the salvation of the believing secondary epistemologically-privileged population:

The foremost duty of Islam in this world is to depose *Jahiliyyah*<sup>10</sup> from the leadership of man, and to take the leadership into its own hands and enforce the particular way of life which is the good and success of mankind, the good which proceeds from returning to the Creator and the success which comes from being in harmony with the rest of the universe.

(Qutb 2002: 131)

The “science” used to determine the dynamics of History often becomes scriptural exegesis of one form or another in these groups (on Qutb’s vanguardist “science”, see Qutb 2002: 32–35). In contrast to other vanguardist forms, however, is the manner in which “science” is closely related to the vanguard party structure itself; *what* is the basis of this “science” is often determined by *who* has the knowledge/authority to determine or interpret the “science”.

The element of totalism in the vanguard of God is expansive; just as History is not limited to this life, so too the totalism of religious vanguardism covers the world and beyond. As Qutb puts it,

Islam, which proclaims that Sovereignty over people belongs to Allah alone, cannot exist without a society that recognizes Allah as its Sovereign and builds its entire system of life on this fundamental principle. When Muslims dedicate themselves entirely to this collective effort, then and only then do they deserve the help of Allah promised to them.

(Qutb 1991: 158)

The totalist perspective here shapes the religious vanguardist relation to the world. The rule of the Divine covers all existence, thus all human life – individual and collective – must act in the Divine’s direction. Religion cannot be a private matter, but instead infuses all aspects of the universe. As such,

Islam is not merely a belief, so that it is enough merely to preach it. Islam, which is a way of life, takes practical steps to organize a movement for freeing man. Other societies do not give it any opportunity to organize its followers according to its own method, and hence it is the duty of Islam to annihilate all such systems, as they are obstacles in the way of universal freedom.

(Qutb 2002: 75)

One should note that when Qutb discusses organization here, he does not mean the setting up of religious sites; rather, this “organization” requires the dominance

of Islam in law, practices, and institutions throughout and totally within a given society; any discordant (and thus “*jahili*”) elements not subservient to Islamic precepts are the “obstacles” to be removed (see also Qutb 2002: 48). The totalism of religious vanguardism diverges in some significant ways from other vanguard forms. For the types discussed in earlier chapters, the positive totality of the “New Man” and “New Society” in the period after the vanguard-led social revolution is contrasted to the negative totality of the present, where the current era is often described as uniquely and inherently oppressive and destructive. While religious vanguard movements based upon dualist forms<sup>11</sup> of religion (for instance, a vanguardist organization based explicitly on Christian Identity) could likely share a similar view of negative/positive totality as the other vanguard forms, this type of structure is more problematic for other vanguards of God. If the Divine is omnipotent and omniscient – and more importantly, is impervious to any harm or damage from any source – then how to explain the negative totality of the present? For most religious vanguards, the answer arises from within the religious tradition itself: various possibilities would include that life on this world is a “testing” or “trial” period, that the existence of free will denotes the possibility of misuse (and thus evils), a cyclical movement of “Golden Ages” of belief interspersed with “Iron Ages” of disbelief and decadence, and so forth. The totality is, in a sense, bifurcated; for the Divine primary population, the positive totality already exists, has existed, and always will exist, but for the secondary believer population, the negative totality of the present reflects a trial, test, or a struggle that is far beyond this world. Regardless of the description of the negative totality, however, religious vanguardism puts heavy emphasis on its major cause: the Enemy population.

As with the epistemologically-privileged population, the Enemy population is similarly divided between a primary and secondary population. The primary Enemy population is usually associated with an embodiment of evil within the religious tradition itself, broadly a “Devil” of some sort. The secondary population are “followers” of this demonic force, although in practice, to be a “follower” of evil simply means not being a follower of the religious vanguard movement’s view of the Divine. The centrality of the Enemy population for religious vanguards is perhaps best illustrated by organizations categorized as “Salafi-Jihadist”, associated with groups such as Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. As Shiraz Maher notes, the “key features” of this ideology are “jihad, *takfir* [‘excommunication’], *al-walā’ wa-l-banā’* [‘loyalty and disavowal’], *tawhīd* [‘oneness of God’] and *ḥākimiyya* [‘securing of political sovereignty for God’]” (Maher 2016: 208; see also 71, 111, 145, 170). Of the five central elements in Salafi-Jihadist ideology, only two are not directly focused on combat with the Enemy: *tawhīd* (which emphasizes the idea of God’s sovereignty and singular nature) and *ḥākimiyya* (focused on creating a political realm that follows Divine rule). The remaining three, to greater or lesser degrees, fixate on interactions with internal and external Enemy populations. While jihad can mean an internal struggle to be righteous, a defining element of Salafi-Jihadist

thought is that “true” jihad is not merely internal; rather, “[t]he word jihad refers exclusively to armed combat” (Azzam 2008a: 122), specifically aimed against the Enemy populations (be they “invaders” in religious lands or, later, as opponents to religious expansion). Similarly, the role of *takfir* (excommunication) plays a major role in “purging” Enemies who are more internal, specifically “heretics”. This element has been especially prevalent with religious vanguards associated with the Islamic State, such as in the aims of Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi (a leader of Al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia, viewed as a precursor to the Islamic State) in his focus on Shi’a Muslims, described as “a cunning enemy who wears the garb of a friend, pretends to agree, and calls for solidarity, but harbors evil and takes tortuous paths” (Al-Zarqawi 252). Additionally, *al-walā’ wa-l-banā’* has played a significant role in shaping Salafi-Jihadist thought, placing enmity between “pious” (vanguard) Muslims against others as a key means of self-identification. For instance, Osama Bin Laden notes that

Such, then, is the basis and foundation of the relationship between the infidel and the Muslim. Battle, animosity, and hatred – directed from the Muslim to the infidel – is the foundation of our religion. And we consider this justice and kindness to them.

(*Bin Laden 2007: 43; see also Al-Zawahiri 2007*)

Even for non-Salafi-Jihadist Islamist vanguards, the stark relationship between the Enemy and the vanguard is striking: “Islam cannot accept any mixing with *Jahiliyyah*, either in its concept or in the modes of living which are derived from this concept. Either Islam will remain, or *Jahiliyyah*” (Qutb 2002: 130).

Religious vanguards, like others, emphasize the totalistic nature of the Enemy’s control of the present era. While some vanguards of God may focus on the meta-physical or non-earthly aspects of this negative totalism (regarding warfare with demons or the like), most will primarily emphasize the Enemy’s role in infusing all parts of existence with oppression and sin. As a result, a core mission of the religious vanguard organization is to overthrow this system, and thus create a “New Society” in which the “truth” can be accepted. As consensual belief plays a major role for many religious vanguards, these groups tend to argue that they are not seeking to convert people by force, but rather to create “fair” conditions for their religion to be preached:

This movement uses the methods of preaching and persuasion for reforming ideas and beliefs; and it uses physical power and *Jihaad* [sic] for abolishing the organizations and authorities of the *Jahili* system which prevents people from reforming their ideas and beliefs but forces them to obey their erroneous ways and make the serve human lords instead of the Almighty Lord. This movement does not confine itself to mere preaching to confront

physical power, as it also does not use compulsion for changing the ideas of people. These two principles are equally important in the method of this religion.

(Qutb 2002: 55)

Note that, while Qutb argues that compulsion cannot be used on beliefs/ideas, he does advocate force to place the political, social, economic, and moral systems under Islamist control; in effect, belief is the only place where direct, physical compulsion is not permitted, while every other aspect of life can be forced. As the Enemy population is strongly entrenched in the world, the party of the vanguard of God has a major role to play in removing the Enemy, purging out heretics, correcting errors and sins in the secondary epistemologically-privileged population, and properly interpreting the dynamics of History revealed through the primary Divine population.

Instead of an “advanced wing” in the sense of earlier vanguard types, the vanguard party is now directed by the “pious” and “devout”, whose piety is dictated by their membership/allegiance to the vanguard organization, which would be typified by “an educated, militant, and rational leadership” (Al-Zawahiri 2008: 196). The vanguard is still the “advanced wing”, in the sense that it is the party that will direct others to holiness (however defined) through the creation of a new world on Earth – one that will also involve divine intervention. The shape of this organization – how leadership is assessed, by what means it is gained, and how it illustrates its understanding of the “science” of God – varies substantially between religious vanguard groups, even those from the “same” religious traditions. The schism in Islam between Sunni and Shi’a populations presents an important contemporary example for religious vanguardism’s style of organization. A striking instance of the vanguard of God – illustrating the dynamics of such a movement as well as operating as one of the few instances where the vanguard of God has gained political power – is the Islamic revolutionary movement of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and the subsequent Islamic Republic of Iran. Focusing on the importance of the *fuqaha* (or “jurists”), Khomeini views these individuals trained in law as serving as the vanguard organization for leading religious believers toward the “New Society” mandated by God. As Khomeini writes,

It is an established principle that “the faqih [jurist; plural: *fuqaha*] has authority over the ruler.” ... This being the case, the true rulers are the *fuqaha* themselves, and rulership ought officially to be theirs, to apply to them, not to those who are obliged to follow the guidance of the *fuqaha* on account of their own ignorance of the law.

(Khomeini 2009: 177)

Beginning with his Council of the Islamic Revolution as the core organization, then also creating the Islamic Republican Party (see Axworthy 2013: 124;

144–145), this religious vanguard movement specifically placed the clergy (or, rather, religious jurists) in the position of the vanguard party, leading the (secondary) epistemologically-privileged population through the vanguard party's knowledge based upon the (primary) epistemologically-privileged population of God.

Within this movement, the notion of “jurist guardianship” (variously called “*velayat-e faqih*” or “*vali-e faqih*”; another variant is “*wilayat al-faqih*”, which involves deferring to the lead religious figure of the Islamic Republic of Iran – for a good overview, see Wimberly 2015) shows a striking overlap of leadership forms from nation-vanguardism and class-vanguardism (but also see Hossainzadeh 2016; Haghayeghi 1993: 37–39); the highest religious official, the full “guardian”, maintains the needed knowledge of History's dynamics (as notable in the classvanguard form), but additionally personifies the “truly” religious and holy individual in a manner similar to nation-vanguardism's view of the leader as the personification of the “true” nation. As with class-vanguardism, the leading party cadre (and its highest leader) must be knowledgeable in the dynamics of History, which in this case is reflected through knowledge of Islamic law. Being intimately familiar with subaltern types of vanguard movements, it appears that Khomeini may have integrated these elements into his own ideas. One can see the continuance of the Iranian influence as an inspiration for other Shi'a vanguardist organizations, particularly in the case of Hezbollah in Lebanon (see Berti 2013: 29–33; Norton 2018: 26).

The Khomeinist system of jurist-vanguards contrasts strongly in its basis with the organizational structures of other Islamist or Salafi-Jihadist religious vanguard parties. While religious vanguard organizations tend toward a structure similar to the leadership principle found in nation-vanguardism, the basis for who should be the leader is notably different between the Khomeinist system of *velayat-e faqih* and those found in the early Muslim Brotherhood or Al-Qaeda. For many of these other groups, it is disillusionment with recognized religious authorities as either being too amicable to the status quo (for early Muslim Brotherhood's consternation with the religious authorities in Egypt, see Mitchell 1969: 212–214) or even appealing to Enemy populations (see Bin Laden 2007) that often inspires the movement toward religious vanguardist politics. For these organizations, vanguard membership shares similarities with other types of vanguardism, insofar as the leaders are viewed as having a greater understanding of the “science” of History (and here, the Divine), usually also connected with the perception of leaders as being particularly pious and religiously observant. In the cases of al-Banna and Bin Laden, the leader is described in nearly hagiographic terms by vanguard party members, but usually viewed as a particularly holy and learned man, rather than as the “embodiment” of the epistemologically-privileged category (as occurs among nation-vanguards and race-vanguards). Even with this leadership principle tendency, however, Islamic-based religious vanguard organizations often also have additional structures – often described as a “advisory council” – that allow for greater stability in leadership succession than is often found in purely leadership principle based vanguard parties.

## Organizational Differences and the Path of the Future

There is an additional element in religious vanguardism, especially of the Islamist type, that is important. The vanguard of God has shown innovative methods in its organizational structures, be it in the emphasis on networked organizational forms by Al-Qaeda, or in the promotion of a modified practice of “leaderless resistance” among followers across the globe by various adherents, particularly by the Islamic State (see, for instance, Sageman 2008). Beyond its vitality in gaining active and passive supporters, Islamist religious vanguardism’s practices point to new directions within vanguardism, directions which may spread to other vanguard types. It is to the future of vanguardism – its new organizational forms, emergent types of vanguards, and the general spread of vanguardist mentalities – that we now turn.

## Notes

- 1 It should be noted, of course, that the discussion in this chapter on the forms of religious vanguardism takes no position on whether such vanguardist forms are the “authentic” realization of a religion, nor if these vanguardist organizations are reflective of the “truest” form of a religion. For a non-believer in a specific (or any) religion, there is no “true” form, with such a question having the same truth-content as “what was Sherlock Holmes’ favorite painting?” A non-believer would only be able to judge a religious movement as “authentic” based upon aesthetic and/or practical grounds rather than on the religion’s “truth”. For believers in the religion, on the other hand, its “true” form is a highly meaningful question. The “authentic” forms of religion vis-à-vis vanguardism are not a concern for our purposes.
- 2 A geographic focus is notable in some types of Hindu nationalism: see Savarkar 2007.
- 3 A useful example comes from Hindu nationalism. Various writers and activists among Hindu nationalists have argued that “[m]any misconceptions ... originated from faulty English translations, [including] this most harmful confusion of Dharma with religion” (Upadhyaya 2007: 152); instead, Dharma appears similar to notions like “natural law” or perhaps the Dao. In such cases, it would become harder to determine if an emergent vanguardist movement was religious or based upon a notion that may be metaphysical, but not religious per se. Also see Qutb 2002: 75.
- 4 The author would particularly like to thank Hassan Bashir for his insightful discussions on these overlaps arising within his own work. All errors, of course, are the author’s own.
- 5 One other type of religion-oriented extremism that presents difficulties in definition concerns the group of ideas surrounding “Traditionalism”. Originating in the work of René Guénon (2001), its more famous adherents include Julius Evola (2002; member of the Italian Fascist party and an influential writer for some parts of the extreme post-war Right) and Frithjof Schuon (founder of the Maryamiyya) (see Sedgwick 2004). Much of the language of some Traditionalists has been borrowed by other extremists of a nationalist or racist bent (for instance, see Hawley 2016: 222–229). The Traditionalist view of religion and its importance is based upon “perennialism”, focused on the esoteric, “deeper” truth that supposedly underlies all true religions. What is notable, however, is the comparative indifference of Traditionalists to any particular religion in itself, rather than the esoteric “truth” lying underneath it: various Traditionalists have followed traditions originating in Islam, Christianity, and Masonic-style religions. While “religious” in a sense, Traditionalist perennialism appears to have more in common

with technocratic modes of thinking (as described in Chapter 3), and thus is involved with vanguardist movements at a degree of separation.

- 6 Henri Lauzière (2016) makes a persuasive argument that “Salafi” has an equivocal meaning historically, broadly divided into “modernist” Salafism (held by Islamist groups such as the early Muslim Brotherhood) and “purist” Salafism (held by organizations like Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State).
- 7 Oliver Roy (2017: 68–71) notes a generational element to current Islamic religious radicalism, with this generation rejecting their “parents” in a manner similar to the “Generation of 1968”. While this comparison is sensible, given the overlaps and connections between Islamic religious vanguards and subaltern-vanguardism, this generational argument is somewhat limited; earlier radical movements showed a similar “parental” rejection, particularly in some strands of Italian Fascism in the 1920s and 1930s.
- 8 While notoriously difficult to summarize, one can view Salafism as reformist movement within Islam, where its adherents

claim to be engaged in a process of purifying Muslim society in accordance with their teachings, and ... it denotes *the* earliest and therefore authentic version of Islam – the Islam of the ‘pious ancestors’, generally understood to refer to the first three generations of Muslims [emphasis in original]

(Haykel 2013: 33–34). See also Lauzière 2016

- 9 There is some qualification on this point. For vanguard of God movements based on religious traditions with an obligatory kinship or location element, or for those traditions that hold a strong view of predestination for believers, the secondary population of believers would have an essential “quality” in a manner similar to other vanguardism types, even if the “trait” is not as empirically clear.
- 10 *Jahiliyyah* is used by Qutb to refer to “ignorance”. Generally in Islam, this term describes the pagan world in the period before the rise of Islam with Muhammad and the first generation of Muslims. Qutb reinterprets this phrase for the modern era, viewing most of the world as being locked in this form of pagan “ignorance”. In his words, “all the societies existing in the world today are *jahili*” (Qutb 2002: 80, see also 80–83).
- 11 “Dualist forms” here indicates religious traditions that believe not in a singular, omnipotent and omniscient Divinity, but rather two warring divinities – a “good God” (or “Light God”) and an “evil God” (or “Dark God”). In contrast to monotheistic religious traditions like Christianity or Islam – where God is a singular divinity, with the universal struggle driven by a fallen and rebellious created entity (the Devil) who aims to recruit/corrupt other created entities (humans) but cannot harm the Divine itself – dualist religions tend to view these “two Gods” as on a comparatively equal plane, and thus a “final victory” of the “Light God” is not a forgone conclusion. For an excellent overview of dualist religion in the West, see Stoyanov 2000.

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# 9

## CONCLUSION

### Transition to What?

One does not fight for ‘ideas,’ one fights for a people – ideas are only the struggle’s instruments, not its goal. [emphasis removed]

*(Faye 2011: 264)*

As the name indicates, the “subaltern transition” denotes a temporary, transitory point in vanguardism. The derivative and comparatively unstable foundations of subaltern ideologies would make its forms unlikely to maintain themselves for extended periods of time, compared to the regimes from the “golden age” of vanguardism at the beginning half of the twentieth century. But the name also signals a direction: transitioning toward what? Vanguardism’s demise? New forms? A resurgence of old forms? Integration and diffusion of its elements?

Rather than engaging in pure speculation upon what vanguardist ideology and organization will transition to, this conclusion will instead discuss some of the major contemporary factors that will likely influence what, if any, forms vanguardism may take in the coming years – the direction, in effect, of the transition. To begin this conclusion, we will discuss a major element in these changes involving technological advancements that have fundamentally shaped both the style of, and needs fulfilled by, organizations. The vanguard of God provides a key instance of changes occurring within vanguardist ideology and organizations, including a shift from human to non-human populations as well as a form of decentralizing of organization through “leaderless resistance” and networked organization. Similar changes can be seen in an “emergent” vanguardist ideology, focused specifically on the Earth in “eco-vanguardism”. We will consider this emergent form briefly as an example of possible next stages of vanguardism. Finally, this conclusion will also consider one of the most important, and disturbing, elements of the subaltern transition: the “mainstreaming” of vanguardist forms of analysis (particularly

category-based epistemology) into general political and social discourse within the West. As technology and new organizational models were instrumental in the formation of vanguardism itself, here we will start with the influence of contemporary changes brought about by the “telecommunications revolution”.

## Organization and Technology: From Centralization to Decentralization

Chapter 7 noted the significant changes in organizational structure between the “classical” forms of vanguardism and the more recent types. Much of this change was dictated by the different social, political, and cultural context following the Second World War. But another major factor – changes in telecommunication technology – is also significant, and continues to play an important role. It is to this technological aspect that we now turn.

Among the original vanguard parties, the mass political parties (among them, the German Social Democratic Party) served as the central examples of both the benefits and the problems in organization. The work of Robert Michels (briefly discussed in Chapter 3) serves as a good starting point. Because of the technological constraints of the times, a centralized, bureaucratic form of organization was necessary to attain political and/or social success. Much of the organizational innovations – vanguardist or otherwise – of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were shaped by the rise of the “mass” both into politics and the economy; the organizational forms theorized and created at this time in part depended upon the types of telecommunication, transportation, and other technologies that were available.

Developed organizational structure provided the means for extended communication and mobilization within a movement/party: disparate members with skills in propaganda, writing, agitation, local mobilization, and sundry other activities could only influence a narrow territory or portion of the population, while their connections through the party would create coordinated actions with influence nationally or even internationally. The technological limitations of Michels’ time – the need for unwieldy printing presses, the amount of time needed for transferring messages between locations, the comparative slowness of transportation – prevented ‘cells’ of individuals from combining communication, mobilization, and other activities across distances, with the party organization filling this need.

*(Gray 2013: 656)*

One notable result of these technological constraints in Michels’ time is the internal organization of the “classical” vanguard parties; whether democratic centralism or the leadership principle, these groups emphasized a form of “top-down” management with some element of feedback from below. One of the factors

encouraging such a style of administration was the need for centralization for an active, and successful, organization. Although somewhat autonomous “cells” could exist (as evident in various smaller anarchist groups), movements and parties required centralization of their numerous parts in order to achieve success, be it through parliamentary elections, agitation toward larger social/political changes, or armed revolution.

Starting in the 1970s, advancements in telecommunications and transportation technology – as well as the decreasing price of many of these technologies – created significant changes in terms of the constraints and opportunities available for vanguard groups. In addition to the transformations in computer technology, the use of satellites (and other telecommunications technology), and the spread of telecommunications technology broadly, the changes in transportation times and costs brought about by the innovations in transoceanic cargo shipping as well as air shipping shift considerably the needs and costs for organizations, as well as the more efficient means of organization.

Where once a party required set links of physical communication, logistics, and printing presses, now a group could do the same with a few cell phones, a laptop, an IP address, and a DHL account. Through the advancements of transportation and telecommunications technology and infrastructure, the extensive, costly, and immobile material infrastructure of parties/groups is now made interconnected, more cost-efficient, and mobile. With these material changes come organizational changes. Rather than requiring a rigid hierarchical system for communication (specifically information allocation and distribution, now organizations can be ‘nodal’ and ‘networked’.

*(Gray 2013: 657; see also 660–667)*

Activities that previously required a centralized, hierarchical organizational style are now possible in a “networked” form of organization. These changes present opportunities and challenges for vanguardist organizations. On the one hand, the diffuse nature of networked systems permit greater speed as well as less vulnerability to detection/infiltration by police forces. On the other hand, the dispersal of resources – human and material – creates significant problems for the centralized command system that holds a pivotal role in vanguardist parties and ideologies.

The decreased need for centralization should not lead one to believe that vanguardist groups will therefore become more democratic. Decentralization appears to create organizational changes that emphasize certain parts of the organization as more important, but in different ways. In this new structure, a solid but generally anonymous core provides ideological and strategic direction to a highly diffuse, decentralized periphery, with moderate levels of organization in between.

The core organization gains influence, power, and reputation by serving as the inspiration for multiple ‘free-floating’ cells. ... Rather than focusing

on developing clear lines of communication between lower levels of the organization and group leaders, the core 'hub' will instead put its efforts into serving as a 'storehouse' for ideological formation, allegiance 'cues,' target information, and technical information, and aligning support networks so that they may contact one another.

*(Gray 2013: 661)*

We could call this organizational form "ideologically hegemonic center over leaderless resistance". Usually associated with the white supremacist writer Louis Beam (1992 [1983]), "leaderless resistance" usually refers to a type of "bottom-up", nearly autochthonous form of extreme action where organization, as such, is nonexistent. While such a form of political violence could exist, most of the examples of such activity (especially from animal rights extremists, ecological extremists, and salafi-jihadists) seem instead to be motivated, somewhat guided, and provided information through some ideological "hub" in a loose form of network organization. While the center may be involved in some "direct action", its primary functions are to set the ideological tone of the movement, attempt to form mergers or alliances with similarly oriented groups, provide guidance on general strategy (such as final organizational aims) and tactics (including potential targets for "direct action"), provide information (such as addresses of targets, materials on creating explosives or how to avoid leaving fabric evidence at a crime scene), identify Enemy groups, and finally to guide followers as to which groups are "allies" and which ones are not.

The center serves as a source of information and guidance, leaving the actual activities to individuals and cells that align themselves with the group. Rather than directly funded, coordinated, and planned activities from the center, we instead have a guided form of "leaderless resistance", using the internet, social media, or other forms of telecommunications as the connections between the "nodes" to the central ideological (and legitimating) "hub". Although the center organization loses much of its power to direct activities as it may desire, it gains something very valuable: anonymity. While agitating for social revolution, self-organized cells that commit criminal and/or radical actions are incapable of directing investigators to their leaders, as they themselves have no idea who they are.<sup>1</sup> One can also see similar moves within race movements (see Simi and Futrell 2010: 83–98), and with these organizational changes, changes in ideology may also arise. In terms of the future of vanguardism, it is unclear whether this style of organizational change will lead to a modified form of vanguardist politics, or instead may be moving to a new type of extremist politics.

These organizational changes are creating significant changes in the manner in which vanguard organizations operate. Indeed, these changes in form may lead to a fully new type of extremist politics. But recent changes are not only a matter of organizational form. Two vanguardist ideologies that appear to have the most vitality also illustrate major differences in their views of the epistemologically-privileged population, leading to notable changes in other areas.

## Emergent Form: The Vanguard of Earth

Let us now turn to an emergent form of vanguardism: eco-vanguardism. As with the vanguard of God, a distinguishing feature of eco-vanguardism is the non-human basis for category-based epistemology, the “population” in this case being the ecosphere (with an emphasis on the notion that such a view is non-anthropocentric). As with religious vanguardism, human populations become a “secondary” epistemologically-privileged population, in contrast to a “primary” population in the form of the “Earth” (whether understood as a complex ecological system, most forms of life including non-human life, or even a broader focus on living and non-living elements of the world). As with the vanguard of God, this shift relieves the eco-vanguard from many of the problems of dissonance within other types of vanguardism; as the Earth cannot “speak” in a non-ambiguous manner, and assessments of improvement or degradation of the ecosphere can be shaped by one’s chosen starting-point, the vanguard of Earth lacks challenges that might arise within class, nation, or race forms of vanguardism.

As it is still developing, this form of vanguardism is much less structured. This lack of structure comes not from a lack of work – theoretical and practical – done by eco-vanguardist ideologues and organizations, or from those environmental thinkers from whom they may borrow, but rather from a lack of any particular form obtaining greater legitimacy over the others. As an analogy, one might say that contemporary eco-vanguardism (as part of the larger environmentalism) is in a similar position to class-vanguardism (as part of the larger social democratic movement) around 1905. This emergent nature is evident within some of the internal discussions among eco-vanguards, perhaps best illustrated by the divide between Dave Foreman and Judi Bari within the organization “EarthFirst!” Foreman advocated for a more purely “ecological” organization and movement (see his discussion in Foreman 1991), while Bari encouraged a more subaltern approach of aligning the ecological movement with other groups in the constellation of the “oppressed”. One sees elements of this dispute within “Industrial Society and Its Future” by Theodore Kaczynski (also known as the “Unabomber”) in an extended discussion that advises against alliances between ecologically focused (and anti-technology) movements with “leftists”, indicating those movements described in the subaltern transition (see Kaczynski 2010: 106–112). It appears that these internal divides continue to this day.<sup>2</sup>

Another notable difference among eco-vanguardism, at least presently, is the eclectic mixture of influences upon it. This eclecticism is not the same as that in subaltern vanguardism, however; in the latter, this mixture is the result of alliance formation among a derivative and undertheorized “oppressed”, while the former instead is a reflection of significant overlaps as well as of influences of history upon ecological extremism. As a matter of historical development, much of eco-vanguardism – in terms of its discourse as well as its personnel – derive from vanguard ideas based upon class or subalterns. Some of these developments are explicit, as illustrated by various groups derisively referred to as “watermelons”



(green on the outside, red on the inside); effectively Marxist or class-based groups that remain basically the same as before, but shifting from the proletariat to the planet (see Foster 2002, 2000 as a possible example). However, like class-vanguards, many vanguards of the Earth can also point to a specific point in History when humanity “fell”, replacing the “*necessarium Adae peccatum*” of the creation of private property with some other fault. One of the best examples would be the neo-Rousseauian idea that the “fall” of humanity in relation to nature came with the shift of human populations from pastoral or hunter/gatherer styles of food acquisition to agricultural forms of organization (for instance, see Wells 2010; Manning 2004; Sunderlin 2003: 44–45; Catton 1980: 120–121).<sup>3</sup> In the words of Crosby, “The Old World Neolithic Revolution, for all its dazzling advances ..., was at its base a matter of the direct control and exploitation of many species for the sake of one: *Homo sapiens*” (Crosby 2004: 21).

More explicitly “green” views have been influenced in an indirect fashion by class-vanguards, arriving via the derivative source of subaltern-vanguards. This subaltern source influences eco-vanguardism in three significant ways. First, the development of the modern environmentalist movement (with eco-vanguardism afterward) occurred during the ascendancy of subaltern-vanguardism in the period of the later 1960s into the 1970s. Just as with earlier vanguard types, the broader cultural and political context helped shape what was viewed as possible and efficient. Second, eco-vanguard groups could more easily integrate the subaltern dynamic of History into their own systems; unlike class- or race-based groups, the ambiguity of “oppression” – and its frequently equivocal usage – as a dynamic was broad enough to include the new, non-human focus of eco-vanguardism. Finally, the organizational structure of eco-vanguards reflects the moves during the subaltern transition from mass-based parties to cell groups intending to form broader parties. In a sense, eco-vanguard groups began from the subaltern starting-point of cell groups and extended it to create the first instances of “ideologically hegemonic center over leaderless resistance”.

While less acknowledged (because it is uncomfortable, to say the least), there are numerous past and contemporary precedents for eco-vanguardism found within the biological paradigm of race-vanguardism. Even contemporary race-vanguards note their environmentalist credentials, attempting to connect “true” ecological concerns with the works of, for instance, white ethnonationalism (see Johnson 2015: 155–187; DeSilva 2012: xiv–xv, 92–95). The interactions between racist and ecological thinking are not themselves new; the similar focus on Haeckel as part of the popularization of Darwinism in the early twentieth century, as well as the importance of Madison Grant in the United States for both the conservation and nativist movements in the same period (see Spiro 2009) are merely two of many possible examples. In a sense, one could say that race-vanguards and eco-vanguards pull from the same sources but from different aspects. Both types tend to be neo-Malthusian, focused on the limitations of resources, but while race-vanguards interpret this scarcity in terms of a particular human group (and thus the need for racial struggle for resources), eco-vanguards tend to perceive

this scarcity as a matter of broader ecosphere balance (with humanity just one part of the whole). Finally, both race-vanguards and eco-vanguards emphasize an aesthetic and/or non-“logocentric” means of viewing reality. The emphasis on the beauty and pristine “purity” of nature is a constant motif in both types. The focus on racial experience also finds resonance in eco-vanguardism, seen in the emphasis on the importance of “thinking like a mountain”.

One final note of importance: while eco-vanguard groups at this point in time are more minor annoyances than major threats, compared to other vanguard groups (especially those focused on God), one should not assume it will remain this way. Vanguard groups depend upon mass society for their ability to function and to grow. One of the main manners of this growth is through the ideas and arguments of the vanguard permeating through the public. With the popularization of ecological language and concerns, eco-vanguardism has the potential for such a spread. In this way, eco-vanguardism in the mid-twenty-first century could play the role that class-vanguards held in the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries.

But popularization is not limited only to ecological views – instead, central elements of vanguardist ideology itself have become popularized. Less noticed because less violent, this “seeping in” of vanguardist terminology and worldview has increased over the period of the subaltern transition. Perhaps even more than the emergence of new vanguard groups, it is this popularization and, in a sense, normalization of vanguardist ideas that may create the next stage in vanguardist politics.

## The Mainstreaming of Category-Based Epistemology

A factor that has decreased the power of vanguardist organizations in the contemporary West is, in a sense, its success: the “mainstreaming” of category-based epistemology.<sup>4</sup> Often discussed in terms of identity politics or “political correctness”, much of the structure and foundation of contemporary political discussion is, in effect, category-based epistemology in a non-vanguardist organizational context (for the moment, at least). Be it in “standpoint epistemology”, “lived experiences”, or similar views, the basis of these views is the same as one would find with earlier vanguards of class, nation, or race: it is one’s traits in a specific population that gives one access to truth, or which damns one to the Enemy category.

This mainstreaming of category-based epistemology has various sources, but perhaps the greatest influence has been the institutionalization of a subaltern style of category-based epistemology within academia in the period after 1968. In the “long march through the institutions” (in Rudi Dutschke’s phrase), aspects of subaltern-vanguardism came to dominate some academic disciplines, while also spawning many new “disciplines” that were explicitly focused upon advocacy and *praxis* rather than more traditional forms of scholarship. Lacking the “correct” standpoint or experience, these earlier forms of research were often rejected as reflecting inherent flaws, structural biases, and marginalizing conclusions: as such, a new “critical” form of research-*cum*-activism instead was promoted as the new

norm. A not-minor number of disciplines and educational institutions position themselves on teaching through the “pedagogy of the oppressed” (Friere 2001). Indeed, the origins of the comparatively recent focus on intersectionality “arose out of a critique of gender-based and race-based research for failing to account for lived experience at neglected points of intersection – ones that tended to reflect multiple locations as opposed to dominant or mixed locations” (McCall 2005: 1780). While these views need not be “progressive” in orientation (see Lindsay 2013), the practical results are a decidedly subaltern-leaning worldview on political and social life.

It is notable that this mainstreaming of category-based epistemology did not also lead to a mainstreaming of vanguardist forms of organization, for which there may be three causes. First, the various limitations on vanguardist formations (discussed in Chapter 7) would all apply here as well. A second cause could be internal changes arising from the “linguistic turn” in many fields, as well as the increased popularity of social constructivist views. With the increased focus – almost at times a form of nominalist obsession – on language, modification and “correction” of language would be the “true” form of praxis; consciousness-raising and linguistic “action”, in a world that is almost entirely socially constructed, become much more revolutionary and world-changing than mobilization, electoral campaigns, or more extreme types of “direct action”. In a sense, it is more “revolutionary” to colonize literature departments and professional associations with the like-minded (even if not organizationally vanguardist) rather than engaging in politics in an ordinary sense. A third cause turns on the specific institutional configuration of the university systems in the West. With guarantees for academic freedom, considerable protection provided by tenure, a comparatively opaque process for hiring and promotion, and the particular importance of peer affirmation (especially for fields in the humanities and some of the social sciences), shifting the organizational structure would have many potential costs and few potential gains. In effect, the institutional structure of the university system provides many benefits for the armchair revolutionary – continued pay and protection of employment, time for research (however defined) and activism, and access to the hiring/promotion process to ensure that the “correct” forms of research (or researchers) are represented – while also avoiding a chronic problem for revolutionaries of all periods: accountability for success or failure of societal change. There is less incentive to radically alter such an organizational setting when one has power, or at least a significant level of freedom; to use the language of the “Generation of ‘68”, major organizational change is preferred when “sticking it to ‘The Man,’” but becomes much less appealing when you *are* “The Man”.

As with the subaltern form, the derivative structure of the mainstreamed form of category-based epistemology – in comparison to earlier types – is striking. Structurally speaking, there are only two differences one might note between denunciations of “bourgeois rationality”/“bourgeois legality” (as one would find

among class-vanguards) and “white heteronormative cis-patriarchal structures of privilege” (as one could encounter in no small amount of research in many disciplines). First, the former is based upon on specific epistemologically-privileged population (with the additional benefit of being concise) while the latter reflects the alliance-formation style of subaltern forms, in which all forms of oppression – no matter how diverse – must in the end come from a singular, and unified, Enemy. Second, the class-vanguard version typically reflected a developed overall theory of History and its dynamics, which (whether it was true or false) provided a coherent vision of how a population may have access to truth while the others are blind. In the mainstreamed version, on the other hand, such an overall vision is lacking, and yet it still requires a significant amount of legitimating weight to be lifted *as if* such a vision were present. This serves as an additional illustration of its derivative character, insofar as possible avenues for legitimation are either so abstract and vague as to merely be slogans (be they “social justice”, an “inclusive society”, or similar, often underdefined, terms), or that theories that provide legitimation lack a “grand theory/history” of this type. While the idea of the oppressed or marginalized as universal subject may still have some strength, these mainstreamed forms offer no means of presenting why these views would be any more true or false than other views; rejecting “meta-narratives”, there is no foundation to assume the views of the marginalized have access to “true” dynamics (should they exist). If following the lead of writers such as Foucault and others, the mainstreamed form of category-based epistemology often takes the stance of “exposure” of hidden structures of domination and power, but without some broader “meta-narrative”, there is no reason to believe the marginalized are any less engaged in domination/power, where rhetoric of justice, equality, or other socially constructed notions would simply be the propaganda means by which the marginalized seek to gain power and dominate. In this sense, then, it is striking (but not surprising) that much of the mainstreamed form of category-based epistemology shares substantial elements with the emerging “alt-right” in the United States and parts of the European “New Right” (such as the *Groupe ment de Recherches et d’Études pour la Civilisation Européenne*, or “GRECE”). The quotation at the start of this chapter would not sound odd coming from a intersectional theorist, but comes from a writer associated with GRECE. The “alt-right” and “New Right” follow the same reasoning and logic as the mainstreamed form of category-based epistemology, sharing the same structure (and indeed, often similar ideas against consumerism, “neoliberalism”, and the like) but differing only on who is the epistemologically-privileged population, and who is the main Enemy. Within the contemporary United States, one could view both the “intersectionality” movement of self-identified progressives as well as the “alt-right” as striking examples of the “mainstreaming” of category-based epistemology (see Gray 2018).

The entry of category-based epistemology into general discourse may have a partially positive outcome, insofar as its greater spread might also entail a decreased tendency toward vanguardism. As a metaphor, viruses that are more contagious by

becoming airborne often lose much of their lethality; perhaps the same may occur in terms of this ideological structure. But as with an airborne virus, just because it causes fewer deaths does not make it any less a disease.

## Conclusion

The cruelty of human beings toward each other, the ongoing allure of indignant self-righteousness, the assumption of being superior to others by “right” of group membership or identity, the inclination to believe another’s ideational disagreement is evidence of essential corruption ... there is little indication that any of these human traits are dead, or will ever die. Whether vanguardism in its past form will rise again, or a derivative form will gain dominance, or some as yet unknowable organizational form will light the fires of destruction again, one need only watch and wait for horrors to come again. But, perhaps seeing how these horrors arose in the past may guide us to prevent – or at least mitigate – such atrocities in the present and future. Cruelty is a very human trait – but so is hope.

## Notes

- 1 One of the best examples of the benefit of anonymity is the North American Animal Liberation Front Press Office (NAALFPO). Although much less extensive than the main ALF page, what it provides is significant:

[t]he webpage itself carries the anonymous ‘communiqués’ from attacking cells – which can range from short recitations of fact to more extensive polemics – as well as provide information and links on animal liberation literature/philosophy, animal liberation activists in prison or facing trial, as well as an ‘enemies list’ of government agents and informers, a contact page to members of the NAALFPO, links to affiliated groups, and pages to offer contributions and buy merchandise to support the group.

(Gray 2013: 662)

- 2 Additionally, we should briefly note some distinctions between eco-vanguardism and environmentalism. Perhaps the greatest distinction between the two is organizational. Eco-vanguards tend to be both more “direct action” oriented, and often have an almost mystical notion of the environment and human relations with it. Environmentalism, especially in its more extreme forms, organizationally has greater similarities to technocracy than vanguardism. Specifically, environmentalism tends to work within established structures and institutions, gives pride of place to “expertise” (variously defined), and is more focused on “pragmatism” rather than social revolution. As such, while eco-vanguards and environmentalists may broadly share the same ideology, organizational structure is central in distinguishing these two groupings. One can look at the distinction between environmentalism and eco-vanguardism (with qualification) as similar to differences between Kautsky’s Social Democratic Party and class-vanguard groups such as the Bolsheviks.
- 3 One could also view this similarity between them as a reflection of Rousseau’s influences on both, but an examination of the connections is too large a digression for this chapter.
- 4 In a way, this “mainstreaming” is similar to Goldberg’s description that much of fascist (or more specifically, statist) theory and aesthetics has become “mainstreamed” into general culture in ways often unacknowledged. See Goldberg 2007: 372–376.

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